

**COLOMBIA'S RELATIONS WITH UNITED STATES WITH
SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE US 'WAR ON DRUGS'**

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SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE US 'WAR ON DRUGS'**

**Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfilment of
the requirement for the award of the degree of**

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

Sarani Mukherjee



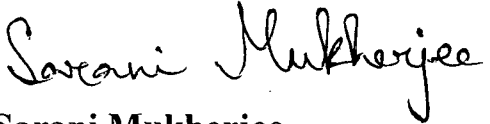
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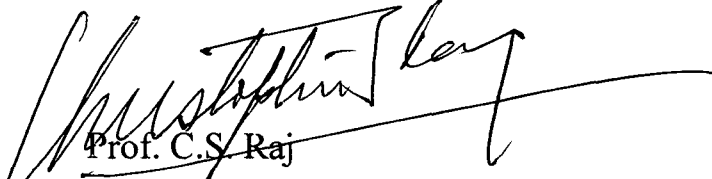
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**Colombia’s Relations with United States With Special Emphasis on The US ‘War on Drugs’**”, submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is my own work and has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.


Sarani Mukherjee

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


Prof. C.S. Raj
(Chairperson)


Prof. Abdul Nafey
(Supervisor)

For Ma & Baba

Preface and Acknowledgements

The issue of narco-trafficking has been a very important issue in the bilateral relationship between Colombia and the US, especially since the 1980s. The US ‘war on drugs’ in Colombia as well as in the whole Andean region has been linked with the ‘war on communism’ in the past and now is being linked with the ‘war on terrorism’. The present study aims at the exploration of the dynamic relationship between Colombia and the US in the context of US ‘war on drugs’, revealing in the process the complexities and dimensions that narco-trafficking has brought upon that relationship.

What has been seen in the case of Colombia-US relationship in the current years is that the sovereignty, stability and integrity of the Colombian state have been severely undermined chiefly due to the US counternarcotics policy towards this country. The US ‘war on drugs’, as well as the domestic near civil war situation in Colombia, has proved a serious threat to the Colombian state and society. And the domestic civil war situation in Colombia has been further aggravated by the US ‘war on drugs’.

More importantly, it is to be examined in this dissertation how the narco problem has served to provide a perennial pretext for the deeper US designs in Colombia. And combining all these issues, the proposed study will attempt an analysis of the Colombian situation, including its domestic political, social and economic as well as foreign policy aspects.

This study consists of five chapters. In the first chapter, the issue of Colombia-US relationship in the context of ‘war on drugs’ will be introduced. The basic points will be summed up in the first chapter. In the following three chapters, the issue of the ‘war on drugs’ will be discussed and explained from three different angles. In the second chapter, the demand side, that is, the US plan, strategy, measures and programmes regarding the ‘war on drugs’ will be discussed and analysed. The US anti-drug strategies, starting from as early as 1914, will be discussed in general. Also, the current US ‘war on drugs’ in Latin America will be dealt with in detail in this chapter.

In the third chapter of this paper the supply side story, that is, the Colombian counternarcotics strategies, plan and programmes will be discussed and analysed. Like the second chapter, here also a president-by-president approach will be adopted while narrating the story. The fourth chapter, on the other hand, will discuss in great detail the impact of the war on drugs on Colombian state and society. It would also seek to answer the crucial question of the actual US interest behind the 'war on drugs'.

The fifth and the final chapter is the concluding one. It will sum up the previous chapters and give an overview of the whole problem very much like this chapter. Simultaneously, it will point out the basic points about the 'war on drugs': its flaws, its actual nature and its changing faces in the present day world.

This research work has been prepared under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Abdul Nafey. And I want to take the opportunity it gives me to acknowledge the people without whom this dissertation would not have been possible. The first name that comes to my mind is that of Dr. Nafey. Without his thorough guidance and immense help throughout the research, it would not have been possible for me to prepare this dissertation. He not only has guided me by providing his insightful comments on the subject, but has also corrected my paper literally word by word with great care. And I would like to thank all my professors in the centre at the same time. All of them have supported and encouraged me throughout the research.

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25 July 2005


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CONTENTS

Preface And Acknowledgements	i-ii
CHAPTER I: Introduction	1-4
CHAPTER II: The US and The 'War on Drugs': The Demand Side Story	5-36
Precedence of Drug Control in The United States	
Origin of The Drug War	
'War on Drugs' in Latin America	
US Narco-enforcement Complex And Militarisation of The 'War on Drugs'	
Summary and Conclusions	
Tables 1 and 2	
CHAPTER III: Narco-trafficking and Colombia: The Supply Side Story in The 'War on Drugs'	37-64
Origin of Narco-trafficking and Narco Terrorism in Colombia	
History of The Colombian Drug Cartels	
Colombian Counternarcotics Policies and Their Impact on Colombia-US Relations	
Summary and Conclusions	
CHAPTER IV: Colombian Internal Situation and The 'War on Drugs'	65-100
Colombian Economy and The 'War on Drugs'	
Colombian Politics, Narco-trafficking and The 'War on Drugs'	
Colombian Society, Law and Order: The Impact of Narco-trafficking and	

The 'War on Drugs'
Guerrillas, Paramilitaries and Armed Forces:
The Political Violence in Colombia
The Impact of The 'War on Drugs' on Colombia
Summary and Conclusions

CHAPTER V: Summary and Conclusions 101-117

The 'War on Drugs'—Certain Basic Points
The Inbuilt Flaws of The 'War on Drugs'
The Potential US Objectives Behind
The 'War on Drugs'

Select Bibliography 118-226

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

The illicit trade in narcotics, an issue in the Latin America-United States (US) relationship for a very long time, got dramatically transformed in the decade of the 1980s. In the past, US policy-makers viewed drug trafficking primarily as a criminal and public health issue, while the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries either neglected the problem, or saw it basically as an American problem to be resolved by the Americans themselves.

However, as the volume of trafficking increased over the time along with the resulting violence and drug-related crimes in the 1980s, the US began looking at drug trafficking as a direct threat to its 'national security' and societal well being, besides posing threats to the security and stability of the entire Western Hemisphere.

The US views drug trafficking as a 'supply side' problem. It means that this menace has to be eradicated and destroyed in the source countries. And the punitive military policies that emerged during president Ronald Reagan's administration (1980-88) still occupy the central position in the US counternarcotics policy in Latin America. On the other hand, Latin America continues to view it as essentially a 'demand-side' problem.

In more than one sense, there is a historical parallel between the current anti-drug crusade and the traditional 'anti-communism' that dominated the Latin America-US relations during the Cold War period. The 'enemy'—now drugs rather than 'communism'—has infiltrated the Hemisphere; and is considered as 'subversive' as 'communism' and 'threats of communism' were in the past. In fact, one finds US often mixing its anti-narcotics policies and strategies with the continued 'war against

communism'. Be that as it may, since 'coexistence' with narcotics is impossible—and more importantly immoral—it is essential to act aggressively to curtail the international drug trade. To achieve this end, the governments of the region should accept and internalise the US hard-line approach and implement it voluntarily, or they can 'justifiably' be made to do so involuntarily through sanctions and coercion.

The US has been engaged in a legal battle against drugs since 1914. In the early 1970s, president Richard Nixon (1968-72) had transformed it into a major issue; and presidents Reagan and George Bush (1988-92) fought it most fiercely in the 1980s and the early 1990s. With the end of the Cold War, the war on 'communism' had by-and-large lost its rationale as a guiding principle of US foreign policy towards LAC countries; it was replaced increasingly by the new 'war on drugs' as the guiding principle of US policy towards the region.

The first declared 'war on drugs' was launched by president Bush in 1989 under his Andean Plan. It majorly altered the relationship between LAC countries and the US. This 'war' was unilaterally driven by the US security objectives, and it was pursued with a strong military component including military aid packages to the Andean countries, stationing of US anti-drug personnel on Latin American soil, and interdiction operation by US Coast Guards in the territorial waters of other countries. Besides, US also declared huge anti-narcotics packages for LAC and ushered the 'era of certification', linking trade concessions, rescheduling of debts and financial inflows and investments to the Latin American countries' participation and conduct of the 'war on drugs'.

Since then a growing militarisation of the whole narcotics issue has taken place in this region. And the worst victim of this growing militarisation is none other than Colombia, one of the most trusted strategic allies of the US during the Cold War period. In terms of US military presence and militarisation of state and society, Colombia occupies the top position among LAC countries. There has been a complete 'narcotization' of US policy regarding Colombia, making other important issues in bilateral relations such as trade, human rights, peace

negotiations with the guerrillas etc. all subservient to the only problem of narco-trafficking. This has had a great impact on Colombian state and society.

The politics of de-certification and the US plan and programmes regarding narco-trafficking (such as Operation Blast Furnace, Operation Snow Cap, The Andean Initiative, Plan Colombia, so on and so forth) have succeeded so as to brush aside all other relevant dimensions of a bilateral relationship between Colombia and the US. Billions of dollars of military aid have made weak, growingly unpopular governments of Colombia to adopt the path of military repression. Issues of labour unrest or rural landlessness have increasingly been seen from the prism of narcotics; and, so to say, militarised.

It, therefore, remains to be examined what the 'war on drugs' has meant for the bilateral relationship between the two countries; what it has meant for Colombia's standing within the region; and how US policy has affected Colombian sovereignty and independence in external relations. And it is equally important in this project to examine what impact it has had on Colombian state and society.

The US 'war on drugs' has not only become the key issue in Colombia's relationship with the US, but it also has had its impact on the Colombian domestic situation. In every sphere—be it economy, politics, society or law and order—the de-certification and military aid, not to mention the whole issue of narcotics itself, have left their imprint on Colombia.

The post-9/11 incidents have aggravated the political situation in Colombia further. The US foreign policy now is being revolved round the issues related to global terrorism and therefore the 'war on drugs' has gained a renowned relevance in US security agenda. For it has been well-accepted by the world community of scholars and policy-makers that drug money is one of the most important sources of finance for the terrorist organizations worldwide, and narco-terrorism is one of the most dangerous forms of international terrorism and trans-national crime. This means actually a deepening of the US role in Colombian domestic politics.

Notwithstanding the end of the Cold War and the transition towards democratisation as well as neoliberal economies in most of Latin America, the US has launched a number of initiatives in the name of 'war on drugs'. These initiatives have strengthened the power of Latin American armed forces, increased their resources, and expanded their role vis-à-vis elected civilian governments, especially at a time when the latter are striving to keep security forces in check. In sum, the 'war on drugs' has contributed to greater power and entrenchment of authoritarian and militaristic elements in these countries.

Even if one strictly talks about the aid given to the target countries, the available statistical data proves beyond doubt that the rest of the world has received only a fraction of what Latin America has received to fight narco-trafficking. And one should note here that these aid packages were markedly military in nature. Among the fifty or so government agencies involved in drug control efforts, the US military is on the frontline of the 'war on drugs' in Latin America.

The US military's anti-drug plans call for it to provide the intelligence, strategic planning, resources, and training needed for the region's security forces to carry out anti-narcotics efforts. Added to that, the military is solely in charge of costly interdiction efforts and participates in domestic law enforcement attempts to stem the flow of illegal drugs into the US. The primary tool for US forces waging the drug war abroad is 'security assistance' which includes economic assistance, training, intelligence support, equipment transfer and maintenance support and advice. The identification of the US objectives forms an integral part of the proposed research. A critical examination of the situation reveals more than that meets the eye. With this brief overview, therefore, of the whole issue of Colombia-US relationship with special emphasis on the US 'war on drugs', the discussion and analysis of the demand side story of the 'war on drugs' can be started.

CHAPTER II

The US and The 'War on Drugs': The Demand Side Story

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The US and The ‘War on Drugs’: The Demand Side Story

“All of us agree that the greatest domestic threat facing our nation today is drugs,” said the United States president George Bush (1988-1992), in his first televised address to the nation on 5th September 1989. Subsequently he declared an all-out ‘war on drugs’, which marked a watershed not only in the US history of drug control but also in the history of US relations with Latin America.¹ The present study is an attempt to present and analyse the different contours of the relationship between one particular Latin American country i.e. Colombia and the US.

The present chapter deals with the US plans, programmes, measures and strategies regarding Colombia in connection with drug wars. A brief background is essential in order to understand the present state of the counternarcotics strategy of the US. The Harrison Act of 1914 has been taken as a starting point, as it was the first striking attempt on the part of the US regarding narcotics and psychoactive substances, though due to the later escalation of drug wars it might seem simplistic enough.²

Starting from 1914, the basic ideology and logic behind drug control strategies in the US till the mid-1960s were more or less the same. The core of US anti-drug measures consisted of various legislations, rules and regulations in order to prohibit the consumption of narcotics drugs. The key word in US drug control policies was *prohibition* until the mid-1960s, since when the entire face of US anti-drug strategies started changing.

¹ While ‘drug wars’ denotes the US anti-drug strategies since president Richard Nixon, ‘war on drugs’ refers to the drug war strategies of president George Bush in particular.

² For better space management, the more popularized words such as ‘drugs’ or ‘narcotics’ will be used hereafter instead of the phrase ‘narcotics and psychoactive substances’.

The era of president Richard Nixon (1968-1972) saw the emergence of the drug issue as a central national policy concern. It started being seen as an issue of national security and a real threat to American society and culture. With the onset of Ronald Reagan's presidency (1980-1988), the drug war of today began in earnest, though it was president George Bush who formally declared a 'war' on drugs.

In this long journey there were some like presidents Gerald Ford (1972-1976), Jimmy Carter (1976-1980) or Bill Clinton (1992-2000) who pursued or, rather, attempted to pursue a lower-profile, more pragmatic, and occasionally reformist drug policies. But the days of being 'soft' on drugs were already gone and presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush took Nixon's drug wars to new heights. And the current president of the US, George W. Bush (2000—present), is no exception.

What is new but of some implications today is that the so-declared 'war on terrorism' has been linked with the 'war on drugs'. Moreover, a globalised as well liberalised market economy based on free trade ideology has thrown an even bigger challenge to its own exponent i.e. the US as it, albeit unwillingly, has helped the drug trade flourishing. Drugs are not anymore a domestic concern. Rather it has become an international threat to each and every country in the world; and more so for the only superpower of today's world i.e. the US, which has more in its hands than it can possibly handle.

But this study is not to deal with the US anti-drug strategies and the problems it is facing therein. Rather it is to examine how these drug wars have changed US's relationship with Colombia and what repercussions they have had on Colombia. Therefore this chapter, after discussing the US plans and policies regarding Colombia as part of its anti-drug strategy in the supply side countries, will proceed further to examine how all other important bilateral issues between these two countries, namely trade, investment, diplomacy etc. have been linked to the drug wars.

In the first section of this chapter, the history of US drug control strategies starting from the Harrison Act in 1914 till the mid-1960s will be dealt with. The next section will discuss and explain how the US presidents, the Congress, and the bureaucracy converted an issue of health and legal importance into a security issue and declared nothing short of a 'war on drugs' in Latin American and Caribbean countries in general, and in Colombia, in particular.

The third section will deal with the evolution of a full-fledged US narco-enforcement complex and the growing role of US military in the 'war on drugs'. And the final section will throw light on the still changing faces of this drug issue in the present day world, its impact on present US drug control policies and the obvious repercussions of those changed policies on the other important issues than drugs in the Colombia-US bilateral relationship. Two tables have also been given at the end of this chapter. Of these two, the first one deals with the US trade with Colombia over a period of 20 years (1985-2004), the second table shows the increase in US counternarcotics aid to Colombia from 1996 to 2004 and the changing nature of that aid. While the first table explains the influence of US anti-drug measures in Colombia on the Colombian-US bilateral trade, the second one shows the basic thrust behind the US counternarcotics aid to Colombia and its militaristic nature.

The impact of 'war on drugs' on Colombia will be dealt in great details in the next two chapters of this paper. The current chapter is basically aiming to provide a background of the present day drug war in Colombia. So the basic thrust is on the US plans and policies regarding the 'war on drugs' in Colombia.

Precedence of Drug Control in The United States

Present day fear psychosis of common American mind regarding drugs such as cocaine, marijuana, heroin and others, may lead a layperson to conclude that the US had been traditionally averse to the idea of consuming drugs. But history is a stern mistress and she rules out the aforesaid conclusion. To understand the current 'war on drugs', it

However, the public attitude towards these drugs started changing in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, US anti-drug policy in those days was largely guided by its foreign policy preferences as well as today. Therefore, international opium control activities also gained major US support. Ever-increasing domestic drug abuses forced the concerned authority to move for regulation and ultimate prohibition for drugs.

All these culminated in the Harrison Act of 1914, which was the first important domestic anti-drug legislation on the part of the US. But what is to be noted here is that this crusade against illegal drugs was chiefly directed towards the alcoholic drinks as is obvious from the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919, which totally prohibited the sale, manufacture, or drinking of such beverages after 1920.

Basically the late nineteenth century as well as the early years of the twentieth century could be described as a period when most of present day's illicit drugs were more or less legally available to the consumers. The US at that time had a drug abuse problem of more or less the similar scale to the present problem, but in those days it was perceived as almost entirely a public and private health issue. Therefore, crime and law enforcement had very little role to play with that. But the paradigm was completely reversed by the 1960s.

With the passage of the Harrison Narcotics Act in 1914, drug addiction became a nationwide concern. The passage of this act neither enjoyed any mass movement in its support like alcohol prohibition, nor it witnessed any broad public opposition. The central question of the-then anti-drug strategy was framed in medical terms: how should the doctors treat problems arising out of consumption of drugs?

By 1930 a new drug policy paradigm came into being. Now the central question was how the government should control drug smugglers, dealers and users. Anti-drug strategies were being institutionalised since the passage of the Harrison Act, and the creation of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) in July 1930 was a significant development. Slowly but surely, an increasingly moralistic and drug-intolerant society

was being formed and in this context the debate over marijuana—nevertheless a political struggle—took place, which culminated in the 1937 Marijuana Tax Act.

With the beginning of the Cold War, the drug issue was interrelated with the foreign threat of communism and the FBN took a major role in both the planning and the execution of the counternarcotics strategy. In this era Latin American countries had been treated as the particularly reserved sphere of US influence ever since the Monroe Doctrine was declared in 1823. Over the years the US policy towards Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region had been constantly shifting from isolation to intervention, from aggression to good neighbour policy. But mainly the US images and perceptions of Latin America and the requirements of its own international strategic goals throughout guided the relationship.

Since the beginning of the Cold War, direct US military interventions took place in several LAC countries. Simultaneously, economic aid programmes (e.g. 'Alliance for Progress' in the Kennedy administration and general foreign aid in every administration then onwards) were being used to achieve specific US goals such as narcotics (the Nixon, Reagan and Bush administrations), human rights, and internal revolution.⁴ Military aid and assistance programmes were closely linked to those economic aid programmes, too, to influence the domestic and external affairs of LAC.

From the period of Richard Nixon drug control became the dominant issue in US relations with the Andean region countries (Colombia, Bolivia and Peru) in Latin America. Three or four declared drug wars took place between early 1970s and 1990s. It began with the Operation Intercept of the Nixon administration, and the successive administrations of presidents Reagan and Bush in the 1980s and the early 1990s embraced the rhetoric and the policies of war and escalated it to new heights, committing vast new resources to the drug wars in the process. And the subsequent Clinton administration as well as that of his successor, George W. Bush, could not or would not reverse this trend.

⁴ Martha L. Cottam, *Images and Intervention: US Policies in Latin America*, (Pittsburgh, 1994), p.4.

Origin of The Drug War

President Nixon declared the abuse of drugs a “national threat” in 1969, thereby moving it to the centre of the-then American political arena. It marked the beginning of US drug war. This section will emphasise only the evolution of the drug war from Nixon period till date. However, the war on the soil of supply side countries will be discussed in the next section. This section basically aims to provide a brief history of US drug war effort as conceived by different presidents and their respective administrations.

Nixon initiated new legislations, increased funding for anti-drug programmes dramatically and launched new crime-fighting treatment programmes. He also expanded the till then small federal anti-drug bureaucracy into a full-fledged “narco-enforcement complex.”⁵ His legislative initiatives also permanently exported the US’s drug war efforts to the supply side countries. His foreign drug wars were designed, to borrow his words, to “strike at the ‘supply’ side of the drug equation—to halt the drug traffic by striking at the illegal producer of drugs, the growing of these plants from which drugs are derived, and trafficking in these drugs beyond our borders.”⁶

From then onwards the war against the supply side became a cornerstone of US anti-drug policy. Mexico (Operation Intercept) and Turkey were Nixon’s first targets. In 1972 the US Congress passed his Drug Abuse Office and Treatment Act. Eighteen months after that, and only ten months after his re-election, Nixon announced in September 1973, “We have turned the corner on drug addiction in the United States.”⁷ The federal anti-drug effort was toned down thereafter. But the legislations, institutions, bureaucracy and logic of the Nixon drug war remained in place and continued as the most important legacies of his period in the successive years.

⁵ Eva Bertram et al., *Drug War Politics: The Price of Denial*, (Berkeley, 1996), p.106.

⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*

⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.108.

Neither Ford nor Carter, the two presidents who followed Nixon, made drug war a priority issue. But both lacked either the will or the ability to reverse the path of Nixon in any significant manner. Though both of them succeeded in deescalating the drug war rhetoric and in removing the issue from the top of their agenda, yet they did not or could not dismantle the drug war bureaucracy, reduce the ever-increasing drug-enforcement spending or reverse the basic elements of the whole strategy.⁸ Any such step was also sure to be resisted by both the bureaucracy and the Congress. Therefore, the institutional and ideological framework created by Nixon continued uninterruptedly. And this later provided the main basis for presidents Reagan's and Bush's vastly escalated drug wars.

It is no exaggeration to say that the year 1981 marked a watershed in the history of US drug war efforts. From then onwards drug wars were escalated in the subsequent years as never before in all respects—funding, rhetoric, and engagement of more bureaucratic institutions in drug war; even the roles of the President and the Congress became more important than ever before.

Two important points should be noted before discussing the Reagan era and the drug wars. The social and political contexts of Reagan's period were quite different from that of his predecessors. A sizable and, more importantly, vocal national constituency was emerging, when he took office, that was nearly fed up with the permissive attitude towards drug use and other such 'counterculture' activities of the-then American society. Traditional family values, conservative Christian morality, and patriotism were the three main pillars on which Reagan based his political agenda to win over the so-called moral majority.⁹

On the other hand, a change also took place in the US drug use patterns at that time. Marijuana and heroin, the more popular illicit drugs of the previous time, came down to the second position as cocaine displaced them in order to become the drug users' first choice in the early 1980s. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a rise in the use of

⁸ *ibid*, p.110.

⁹ *ibid*, p.111.

cocaine. And by 1979 the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) estimated that cocaine use had nearly tripled in two years.¹⁰

There was also another very important change in the drug use patterns. Initially the cocaine users mostly used to come from affluent and middle classes, as powdered cocaine was relatively expensive than other illicit drugs. Cocaine was also considered nonaddictive by users and even many medical authorities. A new, highly addictive cocaine derivative, namely, the 'crack', hit the market at a relatively affordable price in the 1980s. It soon became popular in poor urban neighbourhoods. On one hand, it brought an important racial and class dimension in the drug issue in the US as these neighbourhoods were composed of mainly black and Hispanic population. On the other, it brought the Andean countries—Colombia, Bolivia and Peru—to the centre-stage in drug war efforts, as these were the main cocaine cultivator, producer and smuggler countries. And that is why Reagan period marks a watershed in the present study.

Nancy Reagan's famous 'Just say No' drive—a campaign asking total abstinence from illicit drugs—was a very powerful symbolic attack on the permissive attitudes, the counterculture and the left (which was enemy number one in those Cold War days). The anti-drug campaign was joined by an anti-crime platform to ensure broader public support. Early 1980s also witnessed the resurgence of conservatism, and thus time was ripe for Reagan's escalation of drug war based on the ideological and institutional framework set into force by Nixon.

Reagan first revised the executive branch regulations, organisation and lines of authority. This step was followed by the public relations and legislative campaign, truly aggressive by nature. An executive order was issued drafting the entire federal intelligence apparatus, including Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), into the drug war effort.¹¹ Reagan also ordered them to provide guidance to civilian drug enforcement agencies.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.112.

He also, for the first time in the history of the US anti-drug efforts, cleared the way for the involvement of the US armed forces in the drug wars with the help of amendment to the Posse Comitatus Act that had outlawed armed forces' involvement in civilian law enforcement for more than a century. In many respects, it was a very crucial development. It opened a new chapter in drug war history. The media was also on the side of the president and so was the Congress. Nobody wanted to be labelled as being 'soft' on drugs. This policy offensive proved to be a political success for Reagan.

Three other important legislations should be credited to president Reagan and his Congress. In 1984 the Congress passed the Comprehensive Crime Control Act. This contained several provisions specially designed to strengthen interdiction efforts of US drug law enforcement, such as the Aviation Drug Trafficking Control Act, the Controlled Substances Registration Protection Act, the Bail Reform Act, the Comprehensive Forfeiture Act, the Controlled Substances Amendment Act, the Dangerous Drug Division Control Act, and the Currency and Foreign Transactions Reporting Act Amendments.

The second such important legislation was the Anti Drug Abuse Act of 1986. It is no exaggeration to say that this piece of legislation represented the most comprehensive effort in modern US history to lower domestic demand for illicit drugs on one hand and to reduce the flow of illicit drugs from the source countries into the US, on the other. Certification as an instrument of supply side anti-drug policy was first implemented as part of this act, and since then it has been a matter of immense controversy.

Just before the November 1988 presidential election the US Congress enacted a major new anti-drug law: the Anti Drug Abuse Act of 1988. This act, though focussed more explicitly on the demand side, yet retained the typical traditional emphasis on supply side strategies.¹²

¹² Jonathan Hartlyn et al., ed., *The United States and Latin America in The 1990s: Beyond The Cold War*, (Chapel Hill, 1992), p.230.

Reagan's successor, president George Bush, further intensified the drug war. The era of 'war on drugs' started from his period. President Bush widened the authority of federal agencies in the drug war in an unprecedented manner, although very much like his predecessor he used executive orders and administrative regulations to do so. But more importantly, he used his powers as commander in chief to draft the US military into the drug war, to a degree unmatched by his predecessors. Thus he elevated the role of the armed forces in the drug war to a major national security mission from what earlier had been a relatively minor as well as sporadic one.

The US Defense Department was entrusted with a wider responsibility as it was made the lead agency for detecting drug traffic into the country. It was made responsible for the integration of all command, control and communications relating drug war for building an effective anti-drug network. Finally, it was to approve and fund the state governors' plans for using the National Guard in state interdiction and enforcement.¹³ Funding for the military's drug enforcement activities increased from \$357 million in 1989 to more than \$1 billion in 1992.

Moreover, the president's Office of National drug Control Policy (ONDCP) was created as a part of the drug war effort. William Bennett was appointed as the new drug czar to head the office. The office had a staff of 130 and a budget of \$16.5 million by 1990, conducting public relations with the Congress and the media for the president's growing 'war on drugs'.

All these resulted in the creation of a harsher as well as more expansive anti-drug policy. And more importantly the war against the supply side attained new degrees. The serious negative impact of this strategy and its failure to curtail the problem failed to earn any considerable recognition in such a warlike situation.

It is to be noted here that the various anti-drug operations in the Latin American and Caribbean countries during Reagan and Bush years—such as Operation Blast

¹³ Bertram, n.5, p.115.

Furnace, Operation Snow Cap and more importantly, the Andean Initiative or the Andean Strategy—will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. The Plan Colombia of Clinton administration will also be discussed in the next section.

Bush's entire drug policy was situated in an international context very much different from that of his predecessors. Those were the last days of once-mighty Soviet Union, the traditional enemy of the US for a very long time. With the breakdown of Soviet Union, the 'war against communism' lost its hitherto supreme place in US policy.¹⁴ In this situation, 'war on drugs' was soon elevated to be the new enemy number one of the US and a rationale of its policy towards Latin America.

Economically also, it was a changing situation. With free trade and liberalisation gaining ground, Latin America was trying to recover from the debt crises and the shadow of the 'lost decade' of the 1980s. In such a 'free' world, drug trafficking soon changed its face. The free market strategy reduced the role as well as the power of the state and drug trade soon acquired a place for itself in the international crime league by grabbing the opportunity. It was now an international concern and drug mafia syndicates started behaving like the new powerful multinational corporation (MNC), controlling its own market in a more competent manner. It has had a great impact on the US drug war effort. The change became more obvious in president Clinton's period.

By 1992 disillusionment with the Bush 'war on drugs' strategy was widespread not only among general public but also among the drug analysts. Presidential candidate Bill Clinton thus pledged to change US counternarcotics policy. He promised to combine tough law enforcement with expanded drug treatment and prevention programmes. In the backdrop of Bush's policy that focussed mainly on supply and looked for a military solution of the problem, Clinton promised a new strategy where the emphasis would be on helping the countries fighting drug trafficking both economically and militarily. Thus

¹⁴ In April 1989 George Kennan told the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations that "whatever reasons there may once have been for regarding the Soviet Union primarily as a possible, if not probable, military opponent, the time for that sort of thing has clearly passed."

the focus was still on the source countries, but now US would show its benevolent face rather than the aggressive one.

The new drug control strategy of the Clinton administration was finally released on 8th February 1994. On the next day R. S. Gelbard, the-then Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics Matters declared that the strategy recognised the American share in the international drug trafficking and the US should take care of its responsibility for combating the drug problem. He also listed the key elements of the Clinton administration's counternarcotics strategy, saying, "We will help to build democratic institutions—the courts, law enforcement, community and political organisations—institutions strong enough to resist the reach of the drug trade. We will help drug-producing countries create economic alternatives to narcotics and advance applications for sustainable development. We will fight the multinational cartel...with a multinational effort."¹⁵

His supporters and critics alike immediately questioned Clinton's commitment to the drug war and his seriousness about changing US drug strategy. The new administration wanted, at least on paper, to deescalate its predecessors' drug wars. But its inherited drug war legacy limited its prospects. As there was no organised political constituency pressing for such reform, the constraints Clinton faced were truly formidable. And it was quite evident that he did not want a political battle over the issue. It was clearly not possible for him to afford looking 'soft' on drugs.

Thus it became quite obvious with the beginning of Clinton's second term that there would not be any new direction or dimension in the 'war on drugs' during his administration. The US was to continue to look for a military solution to the drug problem and it was stubborn enough to continue with its war efforts to stop the supply. Only lip service was to be paid regarding decreasing the demand for illicit drugs. And

¹⁵ Ron Chepesiuk, *Hard Target: The United States War Against International Drug Trafficking, 1982-1997*, (North Carolina, 1999), p.92.

this strategy went on without any reform during the period of his successor, George W. Bush, the current president of the US.

The changes that took place in the early 1990s in the international arena, both politically and economically, were further intensified towards the end of the decade. And the new millennium has thrown certain new challenges to the international community, in general, and the US, in particular. With the ideologies of globalisation, free market and liberalisation working in full force, the US anti-drug policy is now at cross-purposes in the source countries, especially at Latin America. Much of US policy towards Latin America in the last few years has been driven by two main agenda: promoting the spread of market reforms and combating the increase in illicit drug trafficking.¹⁶

Thus on one hand, US has resisted state intervention in the market while promoting liberalisation in Latin America. Simultaneously, on the other hand, it has promoted state intervention in the case of illicit drugs trade. It has made source countries in Latin America to comply with this anti-drug objective through direct US diplomatic as well as economic leverage.

The irony, however, is that the compatibility of these two policies is highly questionable, because legal and illegal markets are often intertwined and more so in today's MNC-controlled world. The drug smugglers no longer operate as cartels, rather these days they behave more like corporate bodies.

Another very important issue is the rise of international terrorism in an unprecedented scale in the present day world. The funding for terrorist activities comes among others from illicit drugs trade. Some terrorist organisations are also directly related to this trade. Thus narco terrorism is increasingly becoming an international concern today. International terrorism has hit the US badly in recent times. President George W. Bush declared a global 'war against terrorism' after the 9/11 incident in 2001.

¹⁶ Peter Andreas, "Free Market Reform and Drug Market Prohibition: US policy at Cross-purposes in Latin America," *Third World Quarterly*, (Oxfordshire), vol.16, no.1, March 1995, p.75.

The war in Afghanistan and the Iraq war have kept Bush administration preoccupied in these years.

But it is not to conclude that 'war on drugs' has taken a backseat, rather its degree has been intensified as it is now being connected with 'war on terrorism'. And in both cases the US is seeking a military solution. And the repercussions of such a strategy have raised international as well as domestic responses against the administration.

This discussion on the evolution of drug war from Nixon period till date ends here. This chapter will now look into the US anti-drug strategy in Colombia in the 1980s and the 1990s. The current period will also be included in this analysis. It will also be analysed how the important bilateral issues between Colombia and the US, such as trade, investment etc. have been linked to the drug wars throughout this period.

'War on Drugs' in Latin America

In the early 1980s, the Reagan administration moved ahead with a hard-line agenda for the drug war. This agenda emphasised direct military action over and above everything. South Florida became the first and foremost battleground in this war. US customs and the internal revenue service launched Operation Greenback there. This was basically designed to take the profits out of drug trafficking by using bank records to trace the flow of narcotics money and money laundering. With Latin America increasingly becoming the main focus of drug interdiction, the focus also shifted from heroin to mainly cocaine and also marijuana. Crack became the new headache of US administration. Consequently, Colombia, the home to the global cocaine processing and trafficking, became the most crucial country in the US drug war.

By 1984 Colombia was under serious US pressure to begin to get tough on the drug traffickers, the most famous of them being the Medellin and the Cali cartels at that time. The steps that were being taken in Colombia in this anti-drug war will be discussed at length in the next chapter. However, it should be mentioned here that the-then

president of Colombia, Belisario Betancur Cuertas, expressed solidarity with the US cause when he met Reagan in April 1985. Drug war became the cornerstone of the Colombia-US relationship. It is also to be emphasised here that those were still the Cold War days. And Colombia, a democratic country, was seen as one of the trusted strategic allies of US in LAC region. It was important for US not to let Colombia fall in the hands of either the narco-traffickers or the leftist guerrilla forces.

In 1986, Operation Blast Furnace was launched in Bolivia, one of the two leading cocaine-producing countries (the other being Peru), with direct help from the US military. By the same year Reagan administration, still very much engaged in the Cold War and the threats of 'communist' expansion in Central America, got heavily involved in covert operations to topple the *Sandinista* regime in Nicaragua, through training and financing the Nicaraguan rebels known as *Contra* forces.¹⁷ Reagan tried to link up these two wars as he said: "The link between the governments of such Soviet allies as Cuba and Nicaragua and international narcotics trafficking and terrorism is becoming increasingly clear."¹⁸

Operation Blast Furnace in Bolivia and Operation Snow Cap in Bolivia and Peru were launched with high enthusiasm and equally high funds and rhetoric. In Operation Blast Furnace, 170 US military personnel and six UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters were deployed to the Chapare region of Bolivia for a four month period in 1986 to support raids against suspected cocaine laboratories by Bolivian anti-drug forces and DEA agents.¹⁹ This operation at first produced a decline in cocaine production, but that was temporary. It failed to achieve any significant result.

Operation Snow Cap was launched in 1988. Its basic aim was to provide for a permanent US presence in the coca-growing areas of Bolivia and Peru. Other than the deployment of US helicopters and DEA agents to those Latin American nations, it also

¹⁷ Chepesiuk, n.15, p.72.

¹⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁹ Neal Bernards, ed., *War on Drugs: Opposing Viewpoints*, Opposing Viewpoint Series, (San Diego, 1990), p.167.

included a training programme for the Bolivian and Peruvian forces provided by US Special Forces personnel. The US agents in Peru soon faced not only a stiff resistance by the organised local farmers, but also an armed opposition by the *Sendero Luminoso* ('Shining Path') guerrillas. The Snow Cap operations not only failed to make a mark, it also revealed the problems faced by the US in the supply side 'war on drugs'.

Both of these operations actually revealed the main weaknesses of the US anti-drug strategy in the source countries on the one hand, and capacity of the drug syndicates to resist or evade government attack on the other. Critics of the Bush administration started alleging that the US government policy on drugs had created a "Vietnam war" in the Andes.

Allegations were soon made against Reagan and his vice-president George Bush that the administration and the CIA were covertly sending money and arms to the *Contras* and the funding for all that was basically coming from the drug money. Senator John F. Kerry's Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee report confirmed that there was "substantial evidence of drug smuggling on the part of the *Contras*" and found that the State Department had paid over \$800,000 in *Contra* 'humanitarian' aid to "companies which were either run by indicted drug traffickers or were under investigation by the DEA."²⁰ The Iran-Contra scandal also became public.

Beside these allegations, statistics showed that by the end of 1988 the outgoing administration had achieved very little in drug war in Latin America. It was now for Bush, the new president, to prove his commitment to the 'war on drugs', and to move ahead with his 'tougher' drug war strategies.

The Bush administration, like its predecessor, often called for a reduction in demand for drugs in the US, but anti-drug strategies of the 1980s and the early 1990s mainly emphasised the war against the supply on the soil of the source countries and at

²⁰ *ibid*, pp.153-154.



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borders. By 1991, nearly 70 per cent of the US anti-drug budget went toward reducing supply, particularly cocaine from Colombia, Bolivia and Peru.²¹

Bush started with his 'Andean Strategy' or the 'Andean Initiative' that called for a military solution to the 'war on drugs'. It was to provide some modest military assistance to those three aforesaid countries while encouraging them to involve their own armed forces in this drug war effort. It also included law enforcement advice and economic assistance to those countries. Bush joined leaders from Colombia, Bolivia and Peru in a summit in Cartagena in February 1990 to form what has been called "the world's first antidrug cartel."²²

Despite the failures of Reagan's anti-drug efforts in supply-reduction and their alarming consequences for democracy and human rights in LAC countries, Bush went for the escalation of the drug war. His Andean Initiative provided unprecedented levels of US aid for Colombia, Bolivia and Peru to escalate enforcement as well as economic assistance. However, in one aspect there was a major shift from the past counternarcotics strategy. That was the dramatic extension of militarisation of the 'war on drugs'.

The US signed separate military assistance pacts with Colombia, Bolivia and Peru, assigning a leading role to their respective military forces in the 'war on drugs' and committing extensive US assistance, markedly military by nature. However, this also proved to be a failure in the long run. Successes in curbing the operations of the Medellin cartel in Colombia only led to an increased market share for its competitor, the Cali cartel, for example.

In Colombia the drug cartels not only resisted or fought up the law enforcement, they also succeeded in corrupting important sections of the military, the judiciary and the police. They also were able to win friends among the Colombian poor either through

²¹ Chepesiuk, n.15, p.83.

²² *ibid*, p.84.

remarkable public works projects or by directly engaging them in drug processing or trafficking activities, thereby providing them means of living.

The face of the international drugs trade was thoroughly changed by the early 1990s with drug traffickers showing remarkable flexibility and imagination while responding to the new sophisticated interdiction methods adopted by the narco-enforcement complex. To keep pace with that, the US anti-drug strategy became truly high-tech. Some of the impressive high-tech equipment, networks and systems used by the US military in the 1992 Persian Gulf War began to be employed in the 'war on drugs'.²³ Bush administration went on pouring more and more funds into tactics that over two decades had repeatedly failed to stop the steady expansion of the drug and money laundering.²⁴

The Colombia-US extradition treaty also could not throw a serious challenge to the newly emerging drug cartels in Colombia as well as its old cartels. Moreover, that treaty opened up a heated debate in Colombia and the weak Colombian government was unable to meet up the challenge.

The first years of Clinton administration saw the decline of drug war rhetoric of Reagan and Bush period, but still plenty of money was being spent in the drug war efforts. R. S. Gelbard in his statement before the House International Relations Committee on October 31, 1995 declared: "The focus of our coca crop reduction and trafficking efforts is in Peru, Bolivia and Colombia...we are supporting law enforcement operations aimed at seizing drugs and evidence, thwarting money laundering, and disrupting transportation elements of Colombia-based and other major syndicates."²⁵ He called Clinton's National Drug Control Strategy flexible as well as integrated.

²³ *ibid.* p.89.

²⁴ Douglas W. Payne, "Drugs into Money into Power," *Freedom Review*, (New York), vol.27, no.4, July-August 1996, p.41.

²⁵ R. S. Gelbard, *Statement before the House International Relations Committee*, Washington D. C., October 31, 1995.

Clinton's Plan Colombia in 1998 was equally an ambitious project as was Operation Blast Furnace or Operation Snow Cap. It was essentially a military project involving the training by US special forces of three special Colombian army battalions, along with sixty US helicopters. Critics expressed their concern over Plan Colombia as they opined that it foreshadowed what may become a deeper and more dangerous intervention by the US into the civil and political strife that has plagued Colombia for over a half century.²⁶ They called it just another step in escalating the failed US military drug enforcement policy in Colombia.

The current Bush administration of the US has linked up international terrorism with its drug war strategy, as has been discussed in the previous section. Certain armed insurgency groups all over the world have been listed by the US as 'terrorist' groups. The leading Colombian guerrilla group, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejercito del Pueblo* (the FARC-EP, or simply, the FARC), which controls a considerable share in Colombian drug trade, has been named in that list.²⁷ The US funds to the Colombian military and narco-enforcement have been increased and economic leverage is in its full force in order to help the present Alvaro Uribe government of Colombia to comply with US drug war effort there.

Stagnant, debt-ridden Latin American economies were offered economic help from the US accompanied by several market reforms by the end of the 1980s. This step was linked to US anti-drug strategy in that region. Market liberalisation was seen as facilitating drug market prohibition. US diplomatic and economic policy guidelines in the Andean region were crucially influenced by its ongoing drug war. Perhaps the policy of Certification has been the most important proof of that fact.

Certification as an instrument of drug war abroad was first implemented as part of the Anti Drug Abuse Act of 1986. This law requires that the US government apply

²⁶ DSA Statement on Colombia, www.dsasusa.org/international/colombia.html, dated 30 September 2000.

²⁷ In English, the name can be translated as 'Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army'.

sanctions on countries unless the President of the US reports to the Congress that these countries are fully cooperating with US drug strategies there.

The 'decertified' countries are subjected to various sanctions. They are denied foreign assistance under the Foreign Assistance Act which requires the US President to identify each year the major drug producing and the drug transit countries and determine whether they have fully cooperated with the US or taken adequate steps on their own in narcotics control. The US also votes against extending loans toward the countries by six multilateral development institutions like World Bank.²⁸ Loss of certification status can also lead to trade sanctions and suspension of commercial airline service to these countries.

Certification has always been a controversial issue since its inception, and it has found critics both at home and abroad. The Washington analysts from across the political spectrum have aptly called it a "circus" and they believed that the US has treated different countries by different standards and has often used other foreign policy considerations while determining the certification status. For example, the US decertified Colombia both in 1996 and in 1997, but not Mexico—though there was enough evidence to suggest that the latter was as much corrupted by drug money as the former.²⁹ Again, the US has never seriously threatened Pakistan, the world's largest heroin producer, of cutting of US economic and military aid to it.

The US foreign policy in most of the Latin America, particularly in Colombia, can be truly characterized as drug diplomacy since the 1980s.³⁰ Controlling drug production and exports has officially been the highest US diplomatic priority in Colombia. The US has also allocated economic aid according to the narcotics control

²⁸ Gelbard, n.25. It should also be noted here that the US Congress had actually linked foreign aid to performance in narcotics control as early as 1983.

²⁹ The-then Colombian president Ernesto Samper's alleged connections with the Cali cartel had been a major irritant in Colombia-US relations.

³⁰ Bernards, n.19, p.187.

performance. For example, narcotics-related assistance rose from 30 per cent of all US aid to Colombia in fiscal year (FY) 1984 to more than 90 per cent in FY 1988.³¹

Certification has also been an important source of irritation for Latin American countries. In May 1997, fourteen Latin American countries at the Group of Rio's sixteenth annual ministerial meeting in Paraguay made a declaration critical of the US use of certification in the 'war on drugs'.

Another important proof of the fact that the US trade and investment policy in Colombia (as well as both in Bolivia and Peru) has been linked with its 'war on drugs', is the Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPA) of 1994 which was designed to "expand the economic alternatives for the source countries" that had been fighting to eliminate the production, processing and shipment of illegal drugs.³² This was actually the culmination of the promise made by president Bush at the Cartagena summit of 1990 mentioned earlier in this section. There the Andean nations urged him to create new trade opportunities in order to provide more employment opportunities for displaced workers of the cocaine trade.

The ATPA gave the President the authority "to grant duty-free entry to imports of eligible articles from countries designated as beneficiaries according to criteria set forth in the act."³³ Later the act was renamed as the Andean Trade Preferences and Drug Eradication Act. Colombia now enjoys favoured trade conditions with the US as part of this act that calls for preferential access to US markets as a return for help in the 'war on drugs'.³⁴

Colombia and the US are negotiating an accord regarding FTA (Free trade Agreement) since May 2004 and are expecting to have the final rounds of talks in 2005. This agreement will actually take place as a double reward for the current Uribe

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Chepesiuk, n.15, p.84.

³³ *ibid.*, pp.84-85.

³⁴ Gonjalo Baeza, The Washington Times, July 8, 2004, www.washtimes.com, dated 19 July 2004.

government in Colombia for both curbing the country's fiscal deficit as well as fighting in US drug war efforts in the region.

Colombia-US trade reached \$11 billion in 2003, Colombia's main legal exports to US being oil, coffee, apparel and cut flowers. And now Colombia is the fifth largest destination of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Latin America, which is largely coming in energy, mining and infrastructure sectors. Moreover, Colombia is now home of more than 200 US-based MNCs, mainly operating in the sectors such as energy, automotive, infrastructure, pharmaceutical, consumer products and financial services.

But all these do not mean that Colombia has curbed drug trafficking in any significant way or the US has gained any considerable victory in the drug war abroad. Rather the reverse is true. Therefore, this whole discussion actually raises a very vital question: what are the actual reasons for fighting such a 'war' then?

US Narco-enforcement Complex and Militarisation of The 'War on Drugs'

It is really difficult today to conceive that the present US narco-enforcement complex, a giant enterprise operating in various countries, started in 1914 as a small bureau in the Treasury Department, charged with merely the power to check that only the doctors and the pharmacists sold cocaine and heroin-based drugs.³⁵ Even in the 1960s the federal anti-drug bureaucracy consisted of only a few hundred agents. President Nixon was the first who started transforming it. He increased the budget of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs (BNDD) from \$14.5 million in fiscal year (FY) 1968 to \$64.3 million in FY 1972. Other agencies were also brought to the drug war as well. In 1973, some of these agencies were consolidated into the DEA. By 1981, DEA's budget increased to \$219.4 million.

³⁵ Bertram, n.5, p.126.

During Reagan and Bush period, the DEA budget increased further. In FY 1993, it reached \$756.6 million. There were 3,050 special agents and 6,098 employees in total deployed in more than 170 offices throughout the US and in 48 foreign countries. This trend continued well enough during the Clinton administration, with a 1996 budget request of \$857.4 million.³⁶ The increase in anti-drug budget coincided with the rise in the number of the drug war agencies. Roughly 40 federal agencies or programmes were by then involved in the 'war on drugs'.

Though it was president Reagan who cleared the way for the US military to join the drug war, president Bush made it the frontrunner in the 'war on drugs' in the supply side countries. His successors, Clinton and George W. Bush, did not revert this step even in the face of opposition both at home and abroad.

The US military's budget for drug enforcement increased from \$4.9 million in FY 1982 to more than \$1 billion in FY 1992. The Pentagon created three new joint task forces to fight the 'war on drugs'. The North American Aerospace Defense Command, which was originally created to track incoming Soviet bombers and missiles during the Cold War days, was redirected to target the drug smugglers. The SOUTHCOM (the US Southern Command) in Panama was reorganised to fight the 'war on drugs' in the LAC countries. It not only does the job of destroying coca crop or interdicting drug smuggling, but it also has the responsibility of providing training to the local security forces.

The US National Guard is also a part of this counternarcotics establishment. Several Guard units are involved in drug interdiction and eradication campaigns. The Coast Guard has also been mandated to eliminate "maritime routes as a significant mode for the supply of drugs to the US through seizures, disruption and displacement."³⁷ Many ships and AWACS planes of the Navy's Atlantic Command constantly go around searching for drug planes and boats on the national territorial waters of the Caribbean Basin countries.

³⁶ *ibid*, p.127.

³⁷ Quoted in *ibid*, p.128.

The Pentagon is now the lead federal agency in the US anti-drug programme of aerial and maritime detection of drug traffickers. Hundreds of DEA agents are also at work throughout the whole Central and South America. Many military and naval bases have also been established in Latin America in order to fight the drug war. But the differences between the US civilian counternarcotics agencies and the US military have often raised alarms.

The Andean operations have often been hampered due to those differences. DEA agents often call the American Special Forces personnel “arrogant young brats” with absolutely no knowledge about intelligence or law enforcement.³⁸ While, on the other hand, the army thinks that the DEA agents are merely city cops with no real training for jungle operations or guerrilla warfare. These differences, however, cannot be paid any less importance as it actually points towards the basic doctrinal issues underlying the ‘war on drugs’.

The basic question is: Is the ‘war on drugs’ really a war? Or, is the word ‘war’ being used in this context in a metaphorical sense? For the US military, the Andean drug war is a ‘low intensity conflict’. This is a term that has been historically applied to all wars against Marxist guerrillas. But the drug cartels are motivated by profit pure and simple and not by mere ideology like the guerrillas. And here lies the most important drawback of US counternarcotics strategists. They failed to see that business angle of the whole affair of the international drug trafficking. Or they did not wish to see it for their own vested interests.

Summary and Conclusions

All these have had their effects on Colombia's relationship with the US. There has been a complete ‘narcotization’ of US policy regarding Colombia, making other

³⁸ Robert Emmet Long, ed., *Drugs in America*, (New York, 1993), p.16.

important issues in bilateral relations such as trade, human rights, peace negotiations with the guerrillas etc. all subservient to the only problem of narco-trafficking.

The politics of de-certification and the US plan and programmes regarding narco-trafficking (such as Operation Blast Furnace, Operation Snow Cap, The Andean Initiative, Plan Colombia, so on and so forth) have succeeded so as to brush aside all other relevant dimensions of a bilateral relationship. Billions of dollars of military aid have made weak, growingly unpopular governments to adopt the path of military oppression. Issues of labour unrest or rural landlessness have increasingly been seen from the prism of narcotics; and, so to say, militarised.

The US 'war on drugs' has not only become the key issue in Colombia's relationship with the US, but it also has had its impact on the Colombian domestic situation. In every sphere—be it economy, politics, society or law and order—the de-certification and military aid, not to mention the whole issue of narcotics itself, have left their imprint on Colombia. Narco diplomacy is also affecting its external relations both within Latin America and outside.

The identification of the US objectives forms an integral part of this study. A critical analysis of the situation reveals more than that meets the eye. Strategically, Colombia was a very important ally of the US in the Cold War era. Though the 'war on communism' is apparently over, the strategic advantage of Colombia has not been reduced. The governing conservative elite of Colombia has proved a faithful ally of the US. It has given the US a 'free rein' in its drug war policies, thereby in effect risking Colombia's sovereignty and societal stability.

A true democratisation in Colombia would mean some land reform, changes in economic policies and objectives, the process of bringing back all the political dissenters into the mainstream politics, increase in the civilian power vis-à-vis the military, a cut-off in bureaucratic hegemony and 'red tapism', and an end to the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the select few. And all these would mean a reduction of US

hegemony in Colombia and the entire Andes. And that is something what the only 'superpower' of the world at present cannot afford. Its domestic political and business interests as well as its foreign policy objectives clash with such an idea of reduction of its hegemony anywhere in the world, particularly in the Western Hemisphere.

Drug trafficking has definitely become a central issue in Colombia-US relationship since the late 1980s. The US has defined the problem as one of national security, while on the other hand, for Colombia it has become a threat to both the regional and national security of Colombia and the stability and integrity of the Colombian state and society. And because of their two very different and often contrasting viewpoints regarding the 'war on drugs', the evolved form of drug war has become a very problematic issue in their bilateral relationship. This can easily be understood if one considers the two different cases of Colombia and the US revolving round the same issue of the 'war on drugs'.

To take the case of the US first, as the originator of the *war*, there are several aspects worth discussing. First of all, as has been discussed before in this chapter, drug addiction has become a national policy concern only since the mid-1970s due to the rapidly rising rates of consumption. Drug issue has also succeeded to produce a broad consensus regarding its origins and a dramatic convergence of opinion in the national scale. The trafficking and transport of drugs, rather than their consumption, became the core of the issue. It was being seen as a *foreign* menace and for some, it was a result of the *conspiracy* to undermine the otherwise strong and pure foundations of the US society. And it was not the rather ignorant sections of the US society but even some policy-makers who used to believe, and still do, in this fairy-tale of conspiracy.

Since the beginning of the Reagan administration, a politico-strategic logic started colouring the analysis and response to this issue.³⁹ Thus ideology replaced the hitherto pragmatism enjoyed by the US counternarcotics strategies and measures. And it was this

³⁹ Juan G. Tokatlian, "National Security and Drugs: Their Impact on Colombia-US Relations," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, (Miami), vol.30, no.1, Spring 1988, p.134.

logic that suggested that a war should be waged at the source countries in order to eliminate the foreign problem of illegal drugs. And this war, though of a limited scale and not a *total* war in military terms, would have to be of a coercive-repressive nature. And this logic had only been nurtured in the coming days.

The US has always stressed the use of unilateral and bilateral mechanisms in this war rather than seeking a multilateral approach to the problem. And it has always been the US to direct each and every step in this war for Colombia. And whenever the US talks about *international cooperation*, it means international support in the war against supply, but not demand. Illegal drugs actually pose a security threat to the US at the social, economic and military levels. And the US government itself often forgets the public health side of it.

And the 'war on drugs' has historically been influenced by the other US foreign policy concerns. Thus, for example, the role of the countries like Pakistan, Turkey and the Philippines in the international drug trafficking has always been *ignored* because of their strategic importance to US security, in the Cold War days as well as at present (more so since the onset of the global 'war against terrorism'). While on the other hand, the Latin American countries have had always borne the wrath of the US in case of the 'formers' failure to comply with the latter's counternarcotics measures. Finally, there has been an increasingly close connection between the 'war on drugs' and the US' bilateral relations with the Latin American and Caribbean countries.⁴⁰ The policy of Certification, the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act, the Anti Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988—all point to that proposition.

But the case is entirely different when it comes to the role and position of Colombia in the 'war on drugs'. There, however, have been and are points of convergence between Colombia and the US, but their diagnoses of and approaches to the illegal drug problem have always been different. First of all, all the conflicting and disrupting aspects of drug war—such as institutional instability; corruption; economic,

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p.137.

social and cultural effects; political problems; widespread violence; negative impact on domestic peace and democracy; violation of human rights—all have been borne by Colombia, which is at the receiving end of the ‘war on drugs’, and not by the US.

Initially the Colombians saw the ‘war on drugs’ as something of a foreign origin, in particular the problem of the US. In recent years this view has been changed to a significant extent. Though this reasoning has remained in effect, the domestic dimension of this problem is being more emphasised nowadays as the drug problem has grown both in intensity and in size.⁴¹ Colombian politics, society, economy, law and order—all have been challenged by the drug cartels, which have displayed a remarkable capacity in corrupting every sphere of Colombian society and spreading violence. And the ‘war on drugs’ has only intensified the problem.

Like the case of US, initially a certain socio-economic rationale and pragmatism used to guide the anti-drug measures taken by the Colombian governments. Later, the onset of the cocaine boom, its socio-economic and political insertion into the Colombian society, and, above everything, the increased pressure of the US—all led to the inclusion of political-strategic aspects and a new counternarcotics logic high on rhetoric. Exclusively repressive policies replaced the hitherto enjoyed pragmatism in the Colombian anti-drug strategy.

Colombia, partly due to the increased pressure of the US, failed to internationalise the drug combat effort. Thus instead of seeking a multilateral approach to the problem, it gave the US a free hand to deal with the ‘war on drugs’. Actually, Colombia is now experiencing a political macro-problem related to the ‘war on drugs’. This issue will be dealt in detail in the fourth chapter of this paper. However, it should be noted here that this has undermined the support base of the existing political system in Colombia. And the sovereignty and the stability of the Colombian state and society have thus been put to question. Colombia’s international autonomy, as well as its internal democratic system has been seriously restricted as a result of this. The drug issue has permeated all the other

⁴¹ *ibid*, p.138.

issues in Colombia-US relationship. And it is also affecting all the domestic issues and policies of Colombia as well.

So far the US drug control measures and drug war strategies have been discussed. This chapter has actually provided a background of the whole issue of the drug war. After discussing and explaining the demand side drug war strategies, this study will now move into the supply side strategies in the drug war. In the next chapter, the Colombian anti-drug strategies will be discussed. The next chapter will also deal with the background of the Colombian drug war. The formation and rise of the two hitherto most important drug cartels in Colombia, namely the Medellin and the Cali cartels, into worldwide prominence will also be dealt with in the next chapter. And the impact of the supply side drug war strategies on the Colombia-US relationship will also be examined.

However, the impact of the 'war on drugs' on Colombian state and society will be discussed and analysed in the fourth chapter of this paper. In that fourth chapter the repercussions of US as well as Colombian anti-drug strategies on Colombian society, economy, politics and law and order will be dealt in great details. While the fourth chapter will deal with the challenge the Colombian state and society are facing as a result of the 'war on drugs' being fought on its own soil on the insistence and in accordance with the orders passed by a powerful neighbour (that is, the US), the fifth and the concluding chapter will seek to answer the most fundamental question of this whole study: what are the actual reasons behind the 'war on drugs'?

Presently, therefore, the supply side strategies in the 'war on drugs' should be discussed and analysed in order to understand the war thoroughly. Only when the anti-drug strategies of both the US and Colombia will be discussed in detail, one can proceed further to examine what the war has meant for Colombia, and what impact it has had on the Colombia-US bilateral relationship. This chapter has discussed the US side of the story. The next chapter will discuss the Colombian anti-drug strategies and will also explain the role Colombia has so far played in this 'war on drugs'.

TABLE 1
US Trade With Colombia

Year	Exports	Imports	Balance
1985	1,467.7	1,330.7	137.0
1986	1,318.6	1,874.3	-555.7
1987	1,411.5	2,232.4	-820.9
1988	1,754.2	2,160.9	-406.7
1989	1,924.2	2,555.3	-631.1
1990	2,029.2	3,167.5	-1,138.3
1991	1,951.9	2,736.3	-784.4
1992	3,286.2	2,837.4	448.8
1993	3,234.4	3,031.7	202.7
1994	4,064.3	3,171.0	893.3
1995	4,624.4	3,791.0	833.4
1996	4,714.2	4,423.8	290.4
1997	5,197.1	4,737.4	459.7
1998	4,816.0	4,656.1	159.9
1999	3,559.5	6,259.0	-2,699.5
2000	3,671.5	6,968.0	-3,296.5
2001	3,583.2	5,710.3	-2,127.1
2002	3,582.3	5,604.4	-2,022.1
2003	3,755.8	6,385.1	-2,629.3
2004 (January-August)	2,869.3	4,611.8	-1,742.5

Note: All figures are in millions of US dollars.

Source: US Census Bureau, Foreign Trade Division, Data Dissemination Branch, Washington, D.C., 20233.

TABLE 2
US Counternarcotics Aid to Colombia

	1996 Actual	1997 Actual	1998 Actual	1999 Actual	2000 Actual	2001 Actual	2002 Actual	2003 Estimate	2004 Request
Narcotics Law Enforcement Colombian National Police	13,000	26,450	40,300	22,050	37,300	39,950	134,100	130,950	147,496
Armed Forces Counternarcotics Support	—	5,000	0	2,700	8,450	2,400	104,000	147,050	158,704
Promote Social and Economic Progress	—	—	—	—	—	—	97,900	122,200	122,200
Support to Vulnerable Groups/ IDPs Drug Policy and Awareness	—	—	—	—	—	—	10,000	3,500	5,000
Promote the Rule of Law	—	—	—	—	—	850	22,500	23,500	22,800
Programme Development and Support	2,000	2,000	2,200	2,200	3,309*	4,300	5,400	6,000	6,800

** This estimate appears to include \$91.8 million in Defense Department-administered funds in the 2001 Plan Colombia aid package.*

Note: *All figures are in thousands of US dollars.*

Source: United States Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs.

CHAPTER III

Narco-trafficking and Colombia: The Supply Side Story in The 'War on Drugs'

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Narco-trafficking and Colombia: The Supply Side Story in The ‘War on Drugs’

The general name ‘narcotics’ is used in an all-embracing sense to cover different narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, such as cocaine, marijuana, heroine, cannabis, opium etc. These drugs do vary in their quality, power and effect on the consumer. All the three main plant based drugs—marijuana, cocaine (coca) and heroine (poppy)—are produced in significant amounts in Colombia.

But Colombia holds a more important position in this multinational business of drug trafficking as being the main processor country where coca crop from Bolivia and Peru is processed and trans-shipped for different markets of Europe and the United States. A large number of Colombians are involved in the illegal drug production and processing, international transportation and smuggling, and money laundering and marketing. In the 1980s, Colombia became the largest cocaine producer in the world and it has retained its position through the 1990s as well. Added to that, Colombia produces and supplies the lion’s share of heroine consumed in the US and also exports illegal marijuana.

Illegal drug production and trafficking in Colombia have marked the past 30 years of the country's political history and economic development. The 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of the powerful Medellin and Cali cartels in Colombia. During the 1980s, these two cartels gained notoriety in international cocaine markets. They were destroyed and disbanded later on as a result of the iron fist policy on part of the Colombian government as well as US counternarcotics programmes and policies.

The Colombian presidents Virgilio Barco (1986-1990) and Cesar Gaviria (1990-

1994) followed a war against narco terrorism that destroyed the Medellin cartel. The following President Ernesto Samper (1994-1998), pressured by the US, fought the Cali cartel and incarcerated all its leaders. But that was not the end of it.

Several other small and medium-sized cartels have filled up the vacuum thus created since the mid-1990s. They have posed an even more serious threat to the counternarcotics agencies, as it is much more difficult to track down those cartels due to their size, low-key operational tactics, and a more educated, sophisticated and competent leadership than those of the Medellin and Cali cartels.

These smaller organisations are also functional for heroine smuggling; heroine being the ideal trafficking drug for small criminal organisations because of its higher price and the smaller volume demand in US. Besides, new actors have emerged in the drug industry, particularly right wing paramilitary and left wing guerrilla groups for whom the main source of income is narco money. This has further complicated the whole scenario.

In fact, in no other country the illegal drugs industry has had such dramatic social, political and economic effects. Illegal drugs have contributed greatly to changes in political institutions and values in Colombia, have indirectly conditioned the country's economic performance, and have become a major element in the country's foreign policy. Illegal drug revenues are a primary source of conflicts between left and right wing armed actors in the near civil war situation in Colombia on one hand and between the government forces and armed groups on the other hand.

All these have also led to major changes in Colombia's relationship with the US. The Colombian response to 'war on drugs' has mostly been repressive measures taken by the government from time to time against drug trafficking. Mostly US pressure and sometimes a very imminent domestic threat that challenges the very basis of the State have made the conservative elite-ruled government of Colombia to use force against drug traffickers.

In the previous chapter, the US plan, programme, strategies and measures regarding the ‘war on drugs’ in the supply side countries have been discussed in great detail. The evolution of US counternarcotics policy, ideology, rhetoric and outlook has also been discussed, starting from the early years of the last century. The increasing militarisation of the drug issue by the US and the present attempts to link it with the war on terrorism have been analysed, too. The different dimensions of US drug war under different presidents, their respective administrations and the Congress over the years have been dealt with in that chapter.

In this chapter, the supply side attempts to control narco-trafficking and to put an end to narco terrorism on the part of Colombia will be discussed. This chapter will throw light on the origin of narco-trafficking and narco terrorism in Colombia and will trace the history of the notorious Colombian narco cartels in brief. The main focus, however, will be on how the different presidents and their respective administrations in Colombia had dealt (and is still dealing) with this narco issue and how all this have affected, influenced and shaped the relationship between Colombia and the US in the past as well as in the present.

Origin of Narco-trafficking and Narco Terrorism in Colombia

In the worldwide network of narco-trafficking, the Andean region accounts for the lion’s share of Coca cultivation, cocaine production and its smuggling and marketing. Colombia, Bolivia and Peru—the ‘cocaine triad’ as they are more popularly known in the world of narcotics—illegally as well as legally produce coca crop, process it and smuggle it in the world market.¹ It is necessary to mention a few facts here related to the production, processing and marketing of cocaine before approaching the more serious issues like narco terrorism and counternarcotics operation in this part of the world, particularly in Colombia, as the present study demands.

¹ Though Colombian drug cartels are involved in the trafficking of other narcotic drugs as well, they dominate the world cocaine trade and they have gained their hitherto notoriety by specializing in cocaine. Hence this study has mostly focused on cocaine.

Peru, Bolivia and Colombia supply almost all the world's coca leaf. It is legally grown in Peru and Bolivia and illegally grown in Colombia, and to a lesser extent, in Ecuador and Brazil.² Peru produces almost 60 per cent of world coca crop in its Huallaga Valley, which is known as the "cocaine cradle".³ It is the single largest producer of coca leaf.

Bolivia supplies about 28 to 30 per cent of the coca crop that is grown mainly in the Yungas and Chapare regions. However, it was Bolivia that initiated the large-scale business of coca cultivation in the 1970s for the first time; therefore, it is known as the "grandfather of the cocaine industry".⁴ Colombia is the third largest producer of the coca crop. However, Colombian coca is of less market value thanks to its lower alkaloid content. But it is the world's largest producer of cocaine.

Cocaine is an alkaloid agent that is derived from coca erithroxylon and also from other species of plant from the same family. Since time immemorial, coca has occupied a central role in the primitive agricultural societies of western South America where it had originated. It is an integral element in the regional cultural tradition that respects its curative properties.

It is consumed throughout this region mainly to combat fatigue and hunger, and consumption within this context of tradition had long created a stable pattern of supply and demand and rarely led to abuse or addiction.⁵ As it does not cause physical dependence, though there can be strong psychological dependence, there is no withdrawal symptoms and that makes it all the more popular.

Cocaine processing is a three-stage process. A paste is made first from the Coca

² Alison Jamieson, "Global Drug Trafficking", *Conflict studies*, (Leamington Spa), vol.234, September 1990, p.13.

³ Rajya Lakshmi Karumanchi, "Drug Politics Of Andean Countries", *World Focus*, (New Delhi), vol.12, no.6 (138), June 1991, p.15.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Jamieson, n.2, p.13.

leaves, then it is converted to 'base' cocaine, and then it is refined to cocaine hydrochloride. Crack, which is a cheap derivative of cocaine, first appeared in the Bahamas in 1981, and easily captured the hitherto 'unconquered' parts of the global narcotics market, thanks to its affordable price. While Bolivia and Peru are the main Coca cultivating countries, Colombia carries out the refining and processing of cocaine and markets the end product through a well-organised network in the global markets, chiefly in the US and Europe.

The Central American and the Caribbean countries are the major transit points for cocaine and other narcotic and psychotropic substances from the Andean region to the US, the world's single largest consumer of both cocaine and crack. The main sea routes involve Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica and Puerto Rico among others, and the air routes involve Panama, Belize, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico⁶. Basically, Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean are all into this narcotics business along with the Andean countries. The Central America and the Caribbean countries also form the main destinations for the bulk profit out of this business. They provide safe haven for the money launderers.

Intensification of the counternarcotics arrangements by the Colombian government since the late 1980s has resulted in the deflection of some part of the narco trafficking to the neighbouring countries like Ecuador and more importantly, Brazil. Brazil performs as a major transit country between South America and Africa and it is also a producer of coca crop. The dense jungle on the banks of Amazon has proved to be a very useful cover for drug producing, processing and trafficking. Crack reaches the US mainly through the West Indies.

Cocaine is a relatively new drug in the global narcotics market compared to marijuana, hashish, heroine or opium. It entered the world market only in the 1970s, but within barely a decade it started dominating a large share of the same. By the early 1980s the national economies of a number of South American States themselves became

⁶ Karumanchi, n.3, p.15.

dependent on narco-trafficking. United Nations' analysts have marked certain economic factors as crucial reasons behind the legendary rise of narco-trafficking during the last three decades: according to them, debt crises, falling commodity prices, increasing poverty and narco-trafficking are not only interconnected but mutually reinforcing as well.

According to a report released by United Nations Department of Public Information in January 1990: "The decline of prices for commodities like sugar (by 64 per cent), coffee (30 per cent), cotton (32 per cent) and wheat (17 per cent) between 1980 and 1988 motivated farmers to turn to cash crops like the coca bush and the opium poppy to avoid economic ruin. At the national level the export of illicit drugs often took up the slack of foreign exchange depleted by falling prices for agricultural goods as well as for minerals, including tin (down by 57 per cent in 1980-88 period), lead (28 per cent), crude oil (53 per cent) and iron ore (17 per cent)".⁷ Colombian economy, thanks to narco trafficking, grew steadily in the 'lost decade' of 1980s, at a time when its neighbours stood on the brink of bankruptcy due to the ongoing debt crisis.⁸

Political instability is also a major factor behind the growth of illegal drug trade since the 1970s, as well as one of the biggest problems supply side countries have faced while going forward with their counternarcotics activities. During the last three decades, the drug producing and trafficking countries of South America have experienced at least one of the following socio-political crisis: coup d'etat, armed revolution, invasion, guerrilla warfare, violent ethnic problem, civil war, so on and so forth.

In these economically impoverished and politically turbulent South American countries, the bulk of profit coming from the illegal drug trade have gone towards the purchase of weapons leading to the flourishing of illegal arms trade. And as has already been proved by the analysts, the human as well as organisational structures for one have served the other. The proliferation of sophisticated light weapons, particularly small ones,

⁷ Jamieson, n.2, p.3.

⁸ Mary H Cooper, *The Business of Drugs*, (Mumbai, 1990), p.11.

among non-state actors (drug traffickers, left wing guerrillas and right wing paramilitaries are the main non-state actors in Colombia) and the nexus between traditional insurgents and narco traffickers are salient features of the Colombian narco problem.⁹

Many reasons have been advanced in order to explain the single-handed domination of Colombia of the Latin American drug trade. Geographically, Colombia is well situated to receive coca crop from cultivator countries i.e. Peru and Bolivia on one hand and to transport the finished product by land, sea or air routes to the US and Europe. It is a large country with the dense forests that easily hide the processing laboratories and the secret airstrips from the hands of the narco enforcement agencies.

Added to that, Colombian experience in exporting contraband; a weak government unable to control vast areas within the country; a strong entrepreneurial tradition that helps marketing and distributing the illegal drugs; widespread corruption in Colombian administration, judiciary, military and the society as a whole; the growth of a large underground economy in the 1970s; a large Colombian population in the US providing cover for drug trafficking activities as well as a distributing network throughout the US; and the ruthless as well as businesslike character of the Colombian drug cartels that have become a parallel international power explain this legendary prominence of Colombia in the international drug trade.¹⁰

Narco terrorism began in Colombia when the Medellin cartel came to rule the drug trade there. It believed in the use of brutal force, unlike their competitors, the Cali cartel, which operated more like a corporate body in a businesslike manner. A huge number of people, drawn from every ranks of life—judiciary, media, police, military, politics, and administration were murdered and their families eliminated in the hands of the Medellin cartel. The Colombian government, enjoying the US support, finally curbed the power of the Medellin cartel in the early 1990s. But that was not the end of narco

⁹ Prashant Dikshit, "Small Arms, Drugs and International Terrorism", *International Studies*, (New Delhi), vol.32, no.2, April-June 1995, p.154.

¹⁰ Ron Chepesiuk, *Hard Target: The United States War Against International Drug Trafficking, 1982-1997*, (North Carolina, 1999), p.141.

terrorism in Colombia.

The situation became more complex in the following years with the emergence of several small cartels. The right wing paramilitary groups, the armed forces, the guerrillas and the narco-traffickers—all are vying with each other for share of the proverbial *pie*, that is the booming illegal drug trade in Colombia. They also compete with each other for the control of state power and the control of land. Virtually, there are many non-state actors who throw a substantial challenge to the state itself in Colombia.

This has actually led to a severe socio-political instability in this country. The US ‘war on drugs’ has further complicated the already complex situation in Colombia. But as Rome was not built in a day, this precarious situation in Colombia is also the culmination of a long process of ‘narcotization’ of the whole state and society. In order to understand the present-day situation in Colombia, therefore, one needs to know its origins.

History of The Colombian Drug Cartels

Since the 1970s, the Colombian narco trafficking organisations have dominated the global cocaine trade. These organisations started as small fragmented groups that later evolved into full-fledged sophisticated organisations behaving in the manner of corporate bodies. These organisations are generally called “cartels”, as the term was coined by the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) in the 1980s.

But nowadays some drug analysts prefer not to call them cartels, at least not in the sense of a coalition of producers acting together to restrict the supply and drive up the price of their products, as these organisations at present have acquired the status of trans-national corporations if one is to go by the structure and method of operations.¹¹

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the organisations controlled 70 to 80 per

¹¹ Douglas W. Payne, “Drugs Into Money Into Power”, *Freedom Review*, (New York), vol.27, no.4, July-August 1996, pp.46-47.

cent of the world cocaine trade. By the early 1990s, however, they were also looking to get into the heroin trade. Their strategists concluded that the US middle and upper-middle classes provide a substantial market for heroine. By appointing well-paid agronomists and laboratory technicians, and thanks to Colombian climate and quality of its soil, these organisations soon succeeded in producing the strain of heroine that was purer than that coming from traditional heroine producing areas such as the Golden Crescent (Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran-Central Asia) and the Golden Triangle (Thailand-Myanmar-Laos).

This purer variety of heroine soon became popular in the US market as users could get a sufficient *kick* only by sniffing the powdered drug, saving thereby the pain and stigma of injecting. Thus within five years Colombia became one of the top three producers of heroine.

When Colombia was emerging as a power in the global illegal drug trade, two particular organisations based respectively in Medellin and Cali cities (and therefore known as the Medellin and the Cali cartels) of Colombia, began dominating the market. In their heydays they controlled 60 to 70 per cent of all Andean narcotics trade. The Medellin cartel's most important leaders (or, "capos"¹²) were Pablo Escobar Gaviria ("El Padrino"), Jorge Luis Ochoa ("El Gordo"), Juan David Ochoa and Jose Gonzalo Rodrigues Gacha ("El Mexicano"); while Cali cartel was controlled by the brothers Gilberto ("The Chess Player") and Miguel Rodrigues Orejuela and Jose Santacruz Londono ("El Gordo").

The highly organised drug trafficking network of present day Colombia is said to be the brainchild of Carlos Enrique Lehder Rivas who can claim the credit to plan the consolidation of Colombia's fragmented cocaine trade. He revolutionised the way drugs were smuggled to the US. He was one of the three key *capos* who founded the Medellin cartel in 1978, the other two being Pablo Escobar and Fabio Ochoa (the father of the Ochoa brothers).¹³

¹² A typical Colombian drug-trafficker boss is called a "capo".

¹³ Chepesiuk, n.10, p.142.

The Medellin cartel was named after the city of Medellin, the capital of Antioquia province, which was historically a notorious smuggling centre. It began to play an important role in the global drug trade since 1973 when Chilean drug traffickers moved their the-then flourishing cocaine business to Colombia, as a result of General Augusto Pinochet's high-handed policy against them as soon as he captured power in Chile overthrowing the Salvador Allende government.

Once the Medellin cartel was established, a fast, cheap transportation was needed above all to stay ahead of other competitors. That was provided by Lehder who established a monopoly for the Medellin cartel by smuggling massive shipments of cocaine to the US aboard private cargo planes and high-speed boats that eliminated the traditional 'middleman'.

Routine air corridors were established in South and Central America. The Caribbean islands and Mexico became the most important fuel stops. The Bahamas, Mexico, Nicaragua, Jamaica, Caico Islands, Turks etc. became the major transit places and they were protected by either cartel employees or independent organisations, often controlled by local government officials.¹⁴

But the main credit for the flourishing business of Medellin cartel goes to Pablo Escobar, the "King of cocaine" as he was known to both the enforcement and the criminal world. Thomas V. Cash, a special agent in charge of the DEA's Miami office, commented that, "Escobar was to cocaine what Ford was to automobiles."¹⁵ Escobar acted as the cartel's acknowledged chairman and chief executive officer. He also looked after the security side of this cocaine business. In 1988 Forbes magazine named him one of the world's richest men as his personal fortune was measured to be at \$2.5 billion. All this was the result of the roughly 80 per cent share of the cocaine trade he and his associates controlled at that time.

¹⁴ *ibid*, p.143.

¹⁵ *ibid*, p.14.

Escobar also cultivated a *Robin Hood* image as he paid benevolently for various projects targeting the poor; the most famous among them being a housing project for 1000 poor families in Medellin that was named 'Medellin without slums'. He once stated that to make money in a capitalist society was not a crime but rather a virtue and cut out an image for himself of one who stole from the rich and powerful and gave to the poor.¹⁶

The 'modus operandi' of the Medellin cartel was violent in nature and there was a marked difference from that of its main competitor, the more businesslike Cali cartel. The Medellin cartel used to hit the headlines more often as it was not afraid of violent confrontations even with the Colombian government and it did not hesitate to eliminate all obstacles in its way. During the 1980s, the Medellin cartel used bombings and terrorism, and hired and trained hitmen (called *sicarios*) to kill thousands of people—lawyers, narco enforcement officials, judges, journalists, editors, peasants, union activists, police, military personnel and even prominent politicians.¹⁷ And that was the beginning of the end of Medellin cartel, as Colombian government had had enough and decided to put an end to this narco terrorism, more so because it was being pressurised both internally and externally (by the US).

One striking fact should be noted here that the Colombian government at that time was more interested in curbing narco terrorism, not narco-trafficking; as was evident from its 'not-so-hard' attitude towards the more sophisticated Cali cartel. Even the Colombian anti-narcotics police seemed to regard Cali drug bosses and their associates as '*los caballeros*' (gentlemen) as against '*los hampones*' (hoodlums) of the Medellin cartel.

The shocking assassination of Senator and presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galan by the Medellin cartel on August 18, 1989 led to an all-out war on Colombia's drug cartels as declared by the-then Colombian president Virgilio Barco Vargas.¹⁸ By 1990 the US also escalated the 'war on drugs' to an unprecedented level.

¹⁶ Karumanchi, n.3, p.15.

¹⁷ Chepesiuk, n.10, p.144.

¹⁸ A detailed account of Vargas' policies will be given in the next section.

In this war of attrition from 1984 to 1993, the Medellin cartel lost its strength. Lehder was extradited to the US, Gacha was killed in an encounter, and the Ochoa brothers were sent to jail. Escobar, thanks to his brilliant strategies, wealth and connections, avoided Lehder's fate and managed to remain free for a long time. But in 1993 he was also killed in an encounter with the Colombian police force. Medellin cartel's dominance of the cocaine trade ended with his death. And the Cali cartel, notwithstanding Barco's claim to wipe out drug traffickers from Colombia, claimed the legacy of Medellin cartel.

The architects of Cali cartel were Jose Santacruz Londono and Gilberto Rodriges Orejuela; while the former designed its worldwide trafficking network, the latter looked after the finances. Both started in the decades of '50s and '60s as petty criminals mostly involved in kidnapping. The ransom money they made out of it provided the early capital to finance their entry in the cocaine trade in the 1970s.

By the mid-1970s, the Cali cartel moved into New York City market, while the Medellin cartel was establishing its base in Miami. The Cali cartel, from the beginning, used to operate in a low-key, businesslike, sophisticated manner. They avoided violent confrontations with the authority as long as possible. Bribery proved to be the most fruitful method for Cali cartel kingpins and they poured enough money to build up high-level connections within the State administration, judiciary and bureaucracy.

However, it is not possible for any criminal group, whatever high connections it may enjoy, to get to the top position in the underworld based alone on sophisticated business styles. The Cali cartel was as ruthless as any other cartel in international drug trade might be, but they were smarter than their Medellin colleagues even when it came to violence and it was always the last resort for those professionals. As Robert Bryden, a DEA agent said: "The Cali cartel will kill you if they have to, but they would rather use a lawyer;" and this was probably the single largest factor behind their legendary rise.¹⁹

¹⁹ Chepesiuk, n.10, p.11.

The Cali cartel showed equal smartness in building up a highly equipped technological infrastructure and network that was enviable for even Fortune 500 companies. This advanced technology helped them to remain always one step ahead of the enforcement. This also accounted for their success as well as their keen business sense and sophisticated operating system.

When the war of attrition began in Colombia in the mid-1980s against the Medellin cartel, Cali cartel reaped whatever advantages it could get out of that situation. They moved major part of their cocaine refining operations to Peru and Bolivia and their transportation routes to Central America as well as through Venezuela.²⁰ Cali cartel also began involving itself in heroin trade.

The heroin produced by Cali cartel was both purer and cheaper than the heroin coming from the traditional sources such as the Golden Crescent and the Golden Triangle. Cali cartel was quick as well as smart enough to capture the second position in international heroin trafficking within five years by the mid 1990s. Many new baby cartels also started emerging in Colombia by this time and they marked the changing nature of the drug trade. These “*baby cartelios*” were small in size, but more dangerous and shrewd in operation.

With the fall of the Medellin cartel, it was obvious that the next target of Colombian as well as the US’s counternarcotics enforcement would be the Cali cartel. It started negotiating with the Colombian government to avoid the extradition of its prominent leaders to the US. This led to a controversy both within and outside Colombia.

The US warned Colombian government that any such agreement would in all probability gravely damage the Colombia-US relations. The accusations that the-then Colombian president Ernesto Samper’s 1994 presidential campaign had been funded by the Cali cartel further damaged the relationship. In 1996, Colombia was, for the first time,

²⁰ *ibid*, p.148.

'decertified' by the US and this was repeated again in 1997.

Ironically at the same time the Colombian government achieved surprising success against the Cali cartel. Between June and August 1995, Colombian police captured six of the top seven leaders of Cali cartel with CIA's as well as DEA's help.²¹ These arrests included that of Rodrigues Orejuela and Jose Santacruz Londono. US officials called this incident a "mortal blow" against the Cali cartel. Orejuela brothers are being tried now in the Federal Courts of Miami in the closing months of 2004. And federal law enforcement officials considered them their biggest trophy ever since the murder of Escobar in December 1993.²²

But there is no reason to believe that the end of Cali cartel would mean the end of Colombia's dominance in global drug trafficking. Experts have estimated as many as 300 small cartels operating in Colombia. Due to their small size, it is quite difficult to trace them and find them; but together they throw a substantial challenge to both Colombia and US governments. Such *cartelios* are scattered all over Latin America and though they do not yet have the capacity to become an international power like the Cali cartel in near future, the danger is far from over.

The obscurity of the smaller cartels has been proved very useful for themselves. For instance, in November 1996, Efrain Hernandez Ramirez, a Colombian drug trafficker, was killed by hitmen. He was till then unheard of among the common public, but analysts showed that he was able to buy as many as 30 businesses with his narco money and probably had a criminal operation even bigger than that of Orejuela brothers. This single incidence proves the precariousness of the situation beyond doubt.²³

²¹ *ibid*, p.149.

²² Ann W. O'Neill and Sandra Hernandez, "Colombia Drug Kingpins to Face Trial in Miami, www.cocaine.org/colombia/cali.html, dated 24 November 2004.

²³ Chepesiuk, n.10, p.151.

Colombian Counternarcotics Policies and Their Impact on Colombia-US Relations

Ever since narco-trafficking has become a key issue in the Colombia-US relationship, the US has defined it in security terms, posing it as a threat to US's national security. Thus it has become a criminal issue in the US rather than a public health issue. The social problems related to narcotics and psychoactive substances have been overshadowed by security jargons.

On the other hand, Colombia has approached the issue in a different way. This is not to say that there is no point of convergence between the respective approaches of Colombia and the US, nor does it mean that Colombia has not complied with the US drug war policies in Colombia and in the Andean region as a whole. But the two countries have had two different diagnoses and the roots of this difference lie in their different socio-cultural background and their different status and roles in the global politics and economy. These basic differences again account for the irony that actually the US drug war efforts in Colombia have threatened Colombian state security and social stability rather than the ongoing narco trafficking.

There are several factors that distinguish Colombian diagnosis of the issue from that of the US. First and foremost is the difference in attitudes towards narcotics between these two countries. Narcotic drugs such as marijuana and cocaine had been part of the aboriginal tradition and culture of the South American countries since time immemorial. The Colombians have never seen anything 'evil' about it and for a major part of them narco-trafficking is not anything 'morally unjustifiable' either. Many tend to see it as a means to squeeze money out of the rich capital societies and, indeed, it is the sole livelihood for a large number of people in the Andean and its neighbouring regions. It is, however, narco terrorism as well as the militarisation of the state and society through US 'war on drugs' that concerns the Colombians.

Added to that, these two long-time allies also differ much from each other when it

comes to their respective status and roles played by them in international political as well as economic arena. The US is a superpower both in political and economic terms. It virtually controls international financial institutions such as IMF or World Bank. It enjoys the permanent membership and veto power in the United Nations Security Council.

On the other hand, Colombian economy is quite vulnerable to the changes in international markets. Its main exports being oil and coffee, both primary products, the booms and slumps of the international market are very crucial for Colombian domestic economy, as has always been the case with the 'satellite' countries. A major part of the Colombian economy actually depends on the earnings from international drug trafficking, like Peru and Bolivia, whatever may be the official Colombian comment on that.

Politically, Colombia is in a very precarious situation. Though it has a democratic government and has never been under military rule as such, the Colombian government is too weak to face the challenge thrown by the non-state actors—the narco-traffickers, left wing guerrillas, right wing paramilitaries and the armed forces. Nor it is strong enough to solve various state problems regarding land, housing, power, poverty, corruption, unemployment, so on and so forth.

A more detailed discussion of the Colombian political system and economy and the impact of 'war on drugs' on those will be given in the next chapter of this paper. However, a brief sketch of the Colombian socio-economic situation has been given here as a necessary background to the discussion of the Colombian counternarcotics strategy over the years.

Likewise, the prevalent non-state actors in Colombia, such as the narco-traffickers, the guerrillas, and the paramilitaries have only been mentioned here to provide an idea of the more complex Colombian socio-political situation. However, their role and position in the Colombian state and society as well as in the 'war on drugs' will be discussed and analysed in the next chapter.

From the decade of the 1980s, as a noticeable change took place in the US anti-drug strategies resulting in more and more militarisation of the issue and narcotization of the bilateral relationship, Colombian approaches to narco-trafficking and narco terrorism had also undergone certain basic changes. A brief discussion about these changes is necessary to understand the changing pattern of the Colombia-US relations since the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The most controversial effects of the drug war, which have caused conflicts in Colombia as well as disruption—such as institutional instability; widespread corruption; social, cultural and economic impacts; complex political manifestations; negative repercussions on domestic peace and stability; violation of human rights; undermining true democratic space—started being visible by this time, though the process started earlier.²⁴

The already weak political system could not match up the challenge thrown by the drug traffickers who started playing a crucial role in national politics through both coercion and corruption. Nor it could effectively raise its voice against growing militarisation of the drug war by the US and subsequent narcotization of the relations between the two countries. Colombia, nonetheless, has not deviated from the position till now that the narco problem actually originated from the demand for such drugs in the US market.

There has also been an evolution in the national drug policy of Colombia in recent times. Earlier the government approach towards narcotics was lenient enough. Since the cocaine boom in the 1970s the drug traffickers' control over the state power and the society has widened; along with it the domestic debate on drugs in Colombia has heated up, which now includes issues like social stability, national security and rule of law. This new developments have also asked for an international and multilateral approach in combating narco-trafficking and narco terrorism.

²⁴ Juan G. Tokatlian, "National Security and Drugs: Their impact on Colombia-US Relations", *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*, (Miami), vol.30, no 1, Spring 1998, p.139.

Colombia has not failed to recognise the links between these narcotics issue and other relevant issues in its bilateral relationship with the US. And this recognition has added a new dimension in Colombian approach to drug trafficking as the recent Colombian governments have often used their counternarcotics performance to procure trade, investment, financial aid and other benefits from the US, as a return of their subordination to US policies and goals in the 'war on drugs'. These changing dimensions can be easily understood if one goes through the recent history of Colombian official approach to narco-trafficking since the late 1970s as well as that of the Colombia-US relationship since then onwards.

It is not difficult to identify different stages in the history of the Colombia-US relations. And the stages are closely interrelated with the different phases of their respective approaches to the issue of drug trafficking. In the previous chapter the evolution of US drug policies has been explicitly discussed. Now the Colombian approach towards this issue over the years will be discussed along with its impact on the bilateral relations between these two countries.

By the mid-1970s narcotics became an important issue between Colombia and the US. It was a period of increasing friction between these two nations regarding this issue. The Colombian President Alfonso Lopez Michelsen's government (1974-1978) made an effort to be firmer in resisting US drug policies and objectives in Colombia than its predecessors.

As US failed to persuade Colombia to adopt more repressive measures in the drug trafficking issue, and thanks to the Colombian less aligned and more independent foreign policy during this period, Colombia was charged with serious allegations by US media and policy-makers who hinted Colombian government's participation and collaboration in the drug trafficking.

This negative image of Colombia, not only in the US but also in the whole world,

thanks to US media, proved to be utterly destructive to Colombian economy. The next president Julio Cesar Turbay Ayala (1978-1982) set the task upon himself to carve out a new image for Colombia and to build in Colombia a more cooperative attitude towards US policy objectives in the continent. In 1978 some quiet diplomacy on the drug issue achieved three direct results: (a) signing of the Treaty of Extradition in 1979, (b) drafting of the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty in 1980 and (c) instituting a vast programme to eradicate marijuana, the-then chief illegal drug exported to US from Colombia, on the “successful Mexican model.”²⁵

Rewards were soon to follow. In 1979 Colombia received \$16 million under the International Security Assistance Act. In the next year under bilateral agreement with the US signed during 21st July-16 August period, Colombia received \$13, 225, 000 for eradication and interdiction of illegal drugs. This aid included airplanes, communications and other operational materials to help Colombian counternarcotics enforcement, in accordance with the stipulations of the International Security and Development Cooperation Act of 1980 and the same of 1981.²⁶ This, along with President Turbay Ayala’s pro-US stance regarding the ongoing Central American crisis, meant strengthening of the Colombia US relations.

It should not be assumed, however, that Colombia unconditionally accepted US anti-drug policies in the Andean region. Colombia was not to change its position regarding the origin of the whole narco problem and maintained that it derived from the ever-increasing US demand for drugs, which was, by now, mainly for cocaine than marijuana. However, the administration was convinced that domestically a harsher, tougher and more repressive policy against the drug traffickers was needed to meet up the challenge thrown by them.

The successive administration of president Belisario Betancur Cuartas (1982-1986), however, returned to the path chosen by president Lopez. Betancur associated

²⁵ *ibid*, p.143.

²⁶ *ibid*.

Colombia with the Non-aligned Movement, which was the-then most popular option among the third world countries, and, through the Contadora Group, assumed a leadership in Central America.

This independent stance reflected itself in the Colombia government's decision not to extradite Colombians who are accused of narco crime to US. Betancur refused the proposal initiated by Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, the-then Colombian Minister of Justice, regarding the extradition proceedings against Escobar, Lehder and some of the other Medellin cartel capos, wanted into US on narco trafficking charges, on the basis of a national consensus opposing extradition.²⁷

However, domestically, Betancur government were not to be 'soft' on drug traffickers. Statisticians show that during his period there was a rise in drug seizures and destruction, interdiction efforts, destruction of laboratories, programmes to eradicate narcotics, improved border control mechanisms, a search for substitute crops and other such anti-drug measures.²⁸

Betancur declared a war "without quarter" on all Colombian narco-traffickers and signed the extradition order for Lehder in the wake of the murder of Lara Bonilla in April 1984 by the Medellin cartel, following the spectacular raid on the major cocaine processing Tranquilandia plant in Colombia's South-East Llanos region in the Amazon jointly by DEA and Colombian anti-narcotics enforcement.

He engaged the resources of the Colombian armed forces in these drug war efforts and also declared a 'State of Siege'.²⁹ At that time, however, Colombian armed forces were reluctant to join the 'war on drugs' like their counterparts in the US. Betancur also met US President Ronald Reagan in April 1985 to show Colombian solidarity with US in the fight against narco-trafficking.

²⁷ Chepesiuk, n.10, p.70.

²⁸ Tokatlian, n.24, p.145.

²⁹ Under its rules, even civilians, as well as the members of the armed forces, charged with a narco offence could be tried by court martial.

This “courageous crusade” of Betancur was highly acclaimed by the US which significantly increased its assistance to Colombia to combat narco trafficking: in 1983, \$3,490, 000; in 1984, \$6,765, 000 and the 1985, \$10, 650, 000 had been contributed. Colombia also managed to receive \$1 billion credit from IMF with the consent and support of private banks thanks to the support of the US government, without the strict conditionality of the IMF.

However, Betancur government’s efforts could not prevent the M-19 guerrilla attack on the Palace of justice in November 1985. Several members of the Supreme Court and the judiciary were taken hostage by that guerrilla group. This led the government, political parties, media and the general public to link the guerrillas to the drug trade and the very term ‘narco-guerrilla’ came to the fore.

This was basically the idea of Lewis Tambs, a former US Ambassador, and now the Colombian government adopted it as well.³⁰ The incidents of life threats, kidnappings, and murders were increasing and it became clear that Colombia was at the receiving end in the ‘war on drugs’, paying a price too heavy to bear. This is probably the most crucial inheritance for Betancur’s successor, Virgilio Barco Vargas (1986-1990), when he came to power in 1986.

Barco began with an effort of internationalising and multilateralising the drug issue rather than relying solely on repressive measures against the narco traffickers. The Iran-Contra scandal and the reduction of \$913 million in the US counternarcotics budget, along with other ground realities, influenced Barco to look for international and multilateral anti-narcotics policy.

The ‘war on drugs’ had adversely affected the social stability as well as the democracy in Colombia. Government raids and destruction of narco crops proved fatal for certain social groups, particularly poor peasants who lacked other means of living or

³⁰ Tokatlian, p.146.

any alternative cash crops, and regional economies. Amidst this increasing internal turmoil, the Supreme Court of justice in Colombia declared the 1979 Treaty of Extradition to be unconstitutional and, therefore, null and void.

Under such circumstances, Jorge Luis Ochoa was freed by a Colombian judge, which was posed as a victory of the Medellin cartel over the national government and the US as well. The US readily answered by taking actions against Colombian imports and tourists. The Barco government called a special meeting of the Organisation of American States (OAS) and protested such retaliatory measures on the part of US.

Within Colombia, however, the wealth, fire power and political influence of Medellin and Cali cartel by this time became so enormous that Colombian government seemed to be hardly any match against these ruthless and immensely powerful enemies. Thousands of government officials, political leaders, judges, lawyers, policemen, union activists, journalists, newspaper editors, even peasants faced the wrath of the narco-traffickers. It was the shocking assassination of Senator Luis Carlos Galan, a leading Colombian presidential candidate, by *sicarios* of the Medellin cartel on August 18, 1989, which dramatically highlighted the price in blood that Colombia was paying in the 'war on drugs'.³¹ Barco declared an all-out war on Colombian drug cartels, especially the Medellin.

Barco invoked the extraordinary presidential decree powers available to him under the state-of-siege provisions of the Constitution and declared that his administration would, without late, renew summary extradition of Colombian drug traffickers (thereby circumventing Colombian courts); begin confiscating major capos' bank accounts, properties and other assets and authorise the national police to hold suspects incommunicado for up to seven days.³² Monetary rewards were offered for the first time in Colombia for information regarding the whereabouts of Escobar and Rodrigues Gacha. The Colombian police and military were ordered to conduct

³¹ Bruce Michael Bagley, "Colombia: The Wrong Strategy", *Foreign Policy*, (New York), vol.77, Winter 1989-90, p.154.

³² *ibid*, p.155.

countrywide raids against the narco-traffickers.

Barco also appealed the international community for technical and economic support and asked the US for \$14 million as emergency aid to protect the threatened judiciary in Colombia. The US responded sympathetically and it had already authorised \$65 million emergency aid package containing mostly military equipment. On September 5, 1989, President George Bush's Andean Initiative of \$2.2 billion was launched, which resulted in making the Andes the leading recipient of US military aid in the hemisphere.³³

This was significant as it coincided with the end of the Cold War and was a remarkable sign of the fact that the US's 'enemy number one' was by now narcotic drugs replacing 'communism'. However, the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War diverted the US focus from drugs and by the end of 1992 the failure of the Andean Initiative became obvious. This again coincided with increasing suspicion in the US about Barco's successor, president Cesar Gaviria Trujillo's (1990-1994) anti-drug credentials.

The Gaviria government, unlike its predecessor, opted for a peaceful settlement of the drug conflicts. It aimed to coax the drug traffickers to surrender, confess their crimes, and serve jail sentences in exchange for legal concessions, such as reduced prison terms and guarantees against extradition to the US.³⁴ This proved to be a major opportunity for Medellin capos; but from US viewpoint, there was an inherent deficiency in this peace plan.

Though the Gaviria government had to its credit the elimination of Escobar and destruction of the Medellin cartel and US did applaud all these; but soon allegations were made against it for being *soft* on the Cali cartel. Along with this, Gaviria's increasing independence on the drug issue majorly irritated Washington and the US viewed the next president Ernesto Samper (1994-1998) as a reliable ally and was quite eager to welcome

³³ Russell Crandall, "Explicit Narcotization: US policy Toward Colombia During the Samper Administration", *Latin American Politics And Society*, (Miami), vol.43, no.3, Fall 2001, p.101.

³⁴ R.W. Lee, "Policy Brief: Making the Most of Colombia's Drug Negotiations", *Orbis*, (Oxford), vol.35, no.2, Spring 1991, pp.238-239.

him to power. But soon this 'honeymoon' was over.

There were a number of dry facts questioning Samper's reliability in the 'war on drugs'. As early as 1982 the US suspected him of taking bribes from narco-traffickers when he worked as a campaign manager for Liberal Party presidential candidate Alfonso Lopez Michelsen. Again in 1984 Samper's unlisted telephone number was found in Cali cartel leader Rodrigues Orejuela's address book.³⁵ Samper was also not in the US good book for being an advocate of drug legalisation.

All this was corroborated by the so-called "narco cassettes" which were handed to the DEA by the campaign manager for Samper's opponent and Conservative Party presidential candidate Andres Pastrana, Luis Alberto Moreno, just a few days before the 1994 elections. On one of the tapes, Miguel Rodrigues apparently said that Samper's 1994 presidential campaign had been financed by the Cali cartel. The issue was considered to be too sensitive and consequently US State Department 'hushed' the whole matter for the time being. However, as Samper won the elections, defeating Pastrana by narrow margins, a Bogotá-based DEA agent leaked those cassettes to the media.

Eventually, however, the Colombian Congress (dominated by Samper's own party, the Liberals) declared Samper innocent; but his attorney general, defence Minister, campaign treasurer—all went to jail along with his several other associates. This scandal severely jeopardised Colombia-US relations.

To prove his credentials to the US in 'war on drugs', Samper started taking sporadic yet unprecedented anti-drug actions, such as, Operation Splendor. They often took place just before or after key US decisions on Colombia, such as, the drug certification in 1996 and 1997, or the revocation of Samper's entry visa to the US in 1996, showing on one hand how 'narcotised' had US policies regarding Colombia become, and on the other, how Samper's supposedly 'narco-compromised' presidency

³⁵ Crandall, n.33, p.102.

ended up favouring US drug war efforts in Colombia, whether he liked it or not.³⁶

At the same time Samper's administration was achieving stunning success against the Cali cartel. But US government became obsessed with the ousting of president Samper. While Samper government responded to the diplomatic insult of the revocation of the president's visa by further escalating its counternarcotics efforts; it, however, refused to extradite several leading Colombian drug traffickers to US. The Colombian government asserted that the 1979 extradition treaty was illegal under the new 1991 Constitution. However, Samper was too anxious to clear his name and took immediate steps to amend the 1991 Constitution so as to make extradition legal under it.

It was soon evident that the two consecutive 'de-certifications' of Colombia had been counterproductive for US drug war efforts. They had weakened the Colombian government at a time when a stronger government would have served the US interest better. The guerrilla groups in Colombia became stronger than before at the expense of the Colombian government and this was never the US objective in Colombia. The general consensus in US administration went against further 'de-certification' of Colombia.

In such a situation president Andres Pastrana (1998-2002) came to power in Colombia. From the very beginning US made it clear that Pastrana would have to comply with US drug war efforts. The US Congress passed a resolution that would have cut-off counternarcotics assistance to Colombia if Pastrana's peace negotiations with the FARC guerrillas interfered with counternarcotics arrangements.³⁷

By mid-1999, Pastrana's peace negotiations with the FARC stalled on one hand, while coca cultivation and cocaine production rose unprecedented on the other. US policy towards Colombia improved in coordination and coherence due to this new crisis as Clinton administration became aware of the fact that Colombia's internal instability meant a serious threat to US national security.

³⁶ *ibid*, p.104.

³⁷ *ibid*, p.112.

Apparently it seemed that the US policy during Pastrana period was less 'narcotised' than that during Samper's. But a more focused attention would reveal that this was so because Pastrana agreed to implement as well as support the basic US policy objectives regarding drug war in Colombia. That is why there seemed to be an apparent 'de-narcotization' of the Colombia-US relations during Pastrana period as compared to that of his predecessors.

This inference seems to be largely true for Pastrana's successor, the present Alvaro Uribe (2002—present) government in Colombia. Uribe is complying fully with US counternarcotics policies and goals in Colombia. Extradition of drug traffickers has reached to new height during this administration. Orejuela Brothers have been among the accused drug traffickers facing trial in the US.

Uribe has also met US President George W. Bush in Washington in March 2004 to ask for more US aid to replace Plan Colombia once it runs out in 2005. One of the US's favourite Latin American leaders at present, Uribe has said that he needs to smash the cocaine business because it funds Marxist rebels and right wing paramilitaries.

John Walters, the Director of the White House Office for National Drug Control Policy, more popularly known as Bush's 'drugs czar', has remarked that Uribe's strategy is "paying off".³⁸ However, critics of both US anti-drug efforts in Colombia and the Uribe government are of opinion that these policies are actually haltering the peace negotiations with the right wing paramilitaries and focusing on coca crop eradication has only led to more coca cultivation and cocaine production elsewhere.

Summary and Conclusion

The whole discussion so far presents a very complex picture. The bilateral

³⁸ Jason Webb, "United States Cocaine Users to Feel Colombian Pinch in Year", www.cocaine.org/colombia/prices.html, dated 26 March 2004.

relationship between Colombia and the US has several dimensions. And the drug issue has been intertwined with this relationship at every level. Throughout all these years attention has never been diverted from this narcotics issue. The all pervasive nature of the drug trade has also given rise to a special vocabulary: narco-trafficking, narco terrorism, narco finance, narco corruption, narcocracy, narco diplomacy, so on and so forth—in the Colombia-US relationship.³⁹

The term narco diplomacy points to the major irritant in the Colombia-US relationship, especially since the decade of the 1980s. And the year 1986 witnessed a marked development in this narco diplomacy. An element of coercion was included in the US ‘war on drugs’ at home and, more importantly, abroad since then. The era of ‘certification’ also started the same year, as part of the Anti Drug Abuse Act of 1986.

Subsequently, Bush declared an all-out ‘war’ on drugs in 1989. The term ‘war’ justified the use of the most coercive policy options, such as eradication, extradition and a steadily increasing militarisation of the narcotics issue; thus completely discarding more controversial but possibly more successful alternatives such as negotiation with the drug traffickers and legalisation of drugs.⁴⁰

This militarisation of the drug issue as well as the complete ‘narcotization’ of the bilateral relationship between Colombia and the US has led to an instable political, social and economic situation in Colombia. The Colombian government actually shares the control of the state with three other non-state power groups: the left wing guerrillas, the right wing paramilitaries and the drug traffickers. These three groups again enjoy different permutations and combinations amongst themselves. The US ‘war on drugs’ has further complicated the situation by militarising the state and society in Colombia.

The explicit ‘narcotization’ of the relations between these two countries has made all other important bilateral issues, such as, trade, diplomacy, investment, security

³⁹ Siddhartha Baviskar, “Colombia: Drugs & Democracy”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, (Mumbai), vol.31, no.11, 16 March 1996, p.655.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

cooperation etc. subservient to the 'war on drugs'. The diplomatic relations between them have been baptised as 'narco diplomacy' by international relation analysts and political scientists all over the world. This single fact points out the extent of the narcotization of this relationship.

In the wake of the US 'war on terrorism', 'war on drugs' has been given a new boost. The current US President George W. Bush has declared that the drug consumers are actually helping the global terrorists as narco money forms the main source of finance to these terrorist groups. Colombian near civil war has also been a serious concern for the US and the latter seeks a military solution of the issue, while the former is merely complying with its powerful neighbour's (as well as main trading partner's) policy objectives related to the 'war on drugs'.

All these have actually spelt an imminent danger for Colombian state and society. Colombian national security as well as its social stability is at stake. At this hour a review of the Colombia-US relations and its impact on the Colombian state, society, politics, economy and law and order is of urgent need. The next chapter will, therefore, deal with the very same in detail.

So far the demand side and the supply side policies and strategies in the 'war on drugs', as well as the actual steps taken by the two concerned parties (Colombia and the US), have been discussed and analysed. It has also been discussed in both the previous and the current chapters how the 'war on drugs' has influenced the Colombia-US bilateral relations throughout the period and how all the other important bilateral issues have been subservient to the single issue of the illegal drug trafficking.

In the next chapter, the impact of all these on Colombian state and society will be dealt in detail. The next chapter will deal with the Colombian politics, economy, society, government, non-state actors, armed forces, law and order situation, increasing rate of violence, human rights violations and the influence of the 'war on drugs' on all these. It will seek to answer the crucial question of the actual US interest behind the drug war.

CHAPTER IV

Colombian Internal Situation and The 'War on Drugs'

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The 'war on drugs', as has been examined in the previous chapters, has often been seen by scholars and strategists as something less than a 'total' war. It has never been a 'full-fledged' war strictly in the military sense. But it does not mean that it has had any less effect on Colombian society and its bilateral relationship with the US.

First of all, the war is not Colombian. Though from time to time the Colombian government and the state apparatus have coordinated with the US plans regarding the 'war on drugs', it has never been a spontaneous indigenous effort. Rather, it has something of a 'cosmetic' appearance that emanates from Colombian government's hard efforts to comply with US dictum. And the whole Colombian society and the state are at the receiving end in this war.

However, the impact of the 'war on drugs' has not been the same on different sections of Colombian society. And this explains the different positions taken by different Colombian socio-economic groups regarding the 'war on drugs'. There does exist a class dimension there.

The drug traffickers, for example, have emerged as a new capitalist class. They represent an alternative source of power vis-à-vis the ruling elite. Though they behave very much like the Colombian bourgeoisie engaged in legal trade, they pose a threat to the Colombian system nonetheless. Often the drug traffickers are seen as new-age *Robin Hoods* standing by the poor peasant population of rural as well as urban Colombia as against the Bogotá-based conservative elite governing the country in the name of democracy. They, for obvious reasons, oppose the counternarcotics operations in every way possible.

But the conservative-elitist ruling class of Colombia, though a very vocal supporter of the US 'war on drugs', is also in danger. On one hand, the leftist guerrillas, the drug traffickers and the right wing paramilitaries, striving to capture the state power, are constantly targeting them. On the other they have to bear the wrath of the US in case of their failure to comply with the US anti-drug strategies, ironically, on their own soil. Above everything, the whole credibility of this conservative elite rule is now being questioned within Colombia as well as outside.

The poor peasants are not in a better state either. On one hand, they stand at the mercy of the drug traffickers, guerrillas, paramilitaries and the armed forces. On the other, they suffer in the hands of US drug enforcement agencies such as FBN and DEA. And there is also the intellectual 'middle' class—the lawyers, reporters, journalists, newspaper editors, civic union workers, educationists etc.—who are also being forced to pay the price for this war in one way or another.

It is to be noted here that for the convenience of this discussion the different classes of Colombian society have been analysed in this chapter each as a composite whole. In reality, there are all possible types of permutations and combinations among these classes. And the basic interests also vary from person to person within the same class. However, not to exceed the limit of this paper, the Colombian people have been broadly categorised here into certain classes.

There is a civil warlike situation in Colombia at present. For the past four decades or more, Colombia has been undergoing a 'dirty war'. More about it will be discussed in the due course of this paper. But one point should be mentioned about it here. This 'dirty war' is not only undermining Colombian society, economy, and law and order; but also attacking the credibility of the Colombian state. The 'war on drugs' has further strengthened the root causes of this 'dirty war'. Together these two wars have also affected the bilateral relationship between Colombia and the US. Given the context, it is

hardly surprising that many scholars tend to see a hidden US hand behind the 'dirty war' in Colombia.

Certain questions arise at this juncture. What is the actual impact of the 'war on drugs' on Colombia? What is the relevance of carrying on with this war when it has failed to achieve its so-declared 'objectives'? And, most importantly, why is the US so keen to carry on with this war? Or, to put it directly, why is the US fighting this war in Colombia? This chapter will seek to answer some of these relevant yet problematic questions regarding the US 'war on drugs' in Colombia.

Before discussing the impact of the 'war on drugs' on Colombia, it is necessary to answer a certain question. Some may want to know that how these two issues of drug war and civil warlike situation in Colombia are related. Is it really necessary to study Colombian domestic situation while discussing Colombia-US relationship in the context of 'war on drugs'? The answer is a straight one. Yes, it is necessary and in a broader sense, essential. Because these two issues are very much interrelated and there is a vicious cycle operating in this case.

The US money, military resources and arms come to Colombia to combat drug trafficking. These strengthen the Colombian army. The army in its turn backs the paramilitary squads that also serve the interests of the Colombian business group. These right wing paramilitary squads fight with the left wing guerrillas. And in order to fight the guerrillas they need a huge amount of money.

And the most convenient source of getting that 'easy' money is the narcotics business. And all this is done with the permission and sometimes with direct intervention of the ruling conservative elite in Colombia. The guerrillas also turn to narco-trafficking to continue their struggle. And the huge influx of US arms, both legal and illegal, into Colombian society helps in fuelling up the civil warlike situation in the country. Therefore, Colombian domestic situation is related in every way to its relationship with the US.

Economically also, the US is the biggest market for Colombian legal (oil and coffee, for example) and illegal (cocaine) exports. The US has been the main proponent of the neo-liberal economic model currently operating in Colombia, as elsewhere in the world. The Colombia-US relationship also governs Colombian domestic policies as has been widely discussed in the previous chapters. All this explains why it is no exaggeration to say it is essential to study Colombian domestic situation to comprehend its bilateral relationship with its most powerful neighbour.

While in the first chapter of this paper a broad overview of the whole issue has been given, in the following two chapters the US and Colombian counternarcotics and related policies have been discussed and analysed. The impact of those policies on the bilateral relationship between Colombia and the US has also been explained in those two chapters. In the present chapter, the impact of the 'war on drugs' on Colombian state and society will be discussed. The impact of the war on Colombian economy, politics and law and order will be separately discussed first in three different sections.

An analysis of the major non-state actors (the guerrillas, the drug traffickers and the paramilitaries) in Colombia will be given in the fourth section. The nature and the role of the Colombian armed forces will also be discussed in the same section. In the fifth section of this chapter the impact of the 'war on drugs' on Colombia will be discussed as a whole. A summary and conclusion will follow.

Colombian Economy and The 'war on drugs'

The most marked feature of Colombian economy is its unequal character. It is basically an agricultural and primary export-oriented economy and thus suffers from the drawbacks inherent in that type of economy. But what adds more complications to such an economy is the widespread narco-business in Colombia. The largest legal export of

Colombia is coffee, while the largest illegal export is cocaine.¹ Side by side, there are factors like huge scale of smuggling activities, illegal trafficking of arms, etc.

Economically, the Colombian society is a highly unequal one. The powerful actors in Colombian economy have historically been the agricultural, industrial and financial capitalists. Among them, those connected to important exports, such as coffee, are the dominant ones. Economic as well as social policy-making has for several decades included the organised representatives of these actors.² The political elite has always cooperated and coordinated with this economic counterpart of theirs through interpersonal connections and institutionalised linkages with top business associations and economic conglomerates.

During the last two decades, export-oriented capital and financial interests have attained hegemony in Colombian economy. These economic actors enjoy a cordial relation with their counterparts in the US and the US government as a whole. They are the real flag-bearers of US neo-liberal economic programme in Colombia. And in return, the US supports their dominance in Colombian economy, society and politics.

Then, there are the peasants and the working class. In Colombian countryside, there are mainly two different types of people related to economic activities i.e. agriculture. On one hand, there are the big landowners with large land holdings. Economically and personally, this class is related to the industrial and financial capitalists, the political elite and the army. On the other hand, there are the small peasants and landless labourers. A significant portion of the landless labourers are internally displaced people who prove to be 'easy catch' for the guerrillas and narco-traffickers along with other rural poor.

¹ Of late, oil is fast replacing coffee as Colombian main export item. This has added a new dimension to the Colombia-US relationship. More about it has been given later in this chapter and in the following chapter as well.

² William Aviles, "Institutions, Military Policy, and Human Rights in Colombia," *Latin American Perspectives*, (Thousand Oaks), vol.28, no.1, January 2001, p.35.

The unequal character of Colombian economy prevails in agriculture as well. Since independence, there has been virtually no land reform. Whenever there was any attempt for redistributing land among the poor landless labourers or protecting the poor peasants from the clutch of the big landowning class (*latifundia*), it had been nipped in the bud to save the interest of the elite class. The land reform measures of General Rojas Pinilla or those of the 1970s thus failed to achieve any positive result.

With the creation of National Front in 1957, the Conservatives and the Liberals reached a power-sharing agreement. Many hoped that the ushering of a Liberal period in Colombia would mean new set of economic policies including land reform. But the Liberals, very much like the Conservatives, served the interests of the economic elite and opposed any reform that would hamper those interests.

Many experts believe that the key to Colombian agricultural problems lies in a committed and widespread land reform. Not only that, a well-planned land reform would have helped to solve the problem of guerrilla warfare and the 'dirty war' ongoing in Colombia. But the interests of the economic elite and their linkages with the political elite and armed forces have always prevented such a step. The guerrillas and narco-traffickers have never failed to take advantage of this highly unequal situation.

Of 14.4 million hectares of agricultural land in Colombia, 45 per cent is concentrated in the hands of just 0.3 per cent of the country's landowners, 20 per cent belongs to 2.3 per cent of the landowners and 35 per cent is distributed among 97.4 per cent of Colombian farmers.³ Statistics show that armed conflict in Colombia is undermining landownership for citizens by displacing poor peasants from their small and medium size holdings, and thus causing the consolidation of large landholdings in the hands of fewer elites.

³ Yadira Ferrer, "Colombia: Armed Conflict as Agrarian Counter-Reform," www.progress.org, dated 7 July 2005.

The coffee-based economy of Colombia asks for big landholdings as it provides the cultivator economic benefits. Large area of land is needed for commercial coffee cultivation. To achieve this end, the rural landowners and cattle ranchers often use hired armed groups to displace the poor peasants. Between 1996 and 1999, the armed conflict in rural Colombia—involving guerrillas, paramilitaries and government armed forces—pushed 86,799 families from their homes, for a total of 1,480,493 hectares, most of which is agricultural land.⁴

In fact under the narco-traffickers, Colombia has experienced a reverse process of land reform. For the widespread cultivation of coca, opium, cannabis or marijuana, vast tracts of land is needed. As the wealth and power of the Colombian drug *capos* increased with time, they went for consolidating large landholdings to reap the economic benefit from the cultivation of narcotic crops. They have used both money and muscle power to accumulate enough land for that purpose.

Like the traditional Colombian rural elite, they have used personal armed groups to ouster the small peasants from their land. This has not only helped them to consolidate big landholdings, but also solved the problem of cheap labour needed for their whole business process, starting from cultivation to smuggling of illegal drugs to US and Europe. For the displaced peasants, unable to find any other suitable job to earn their livelihood, have promptly joined the narco-trafficking business as hired labourers. The huge number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Colombia as a result of this practice as well as the ‘dirty war’ ongoing in the country is actually shocking and the number is increasing every year.

And this practice has acted as a positive catalyst in the emergence of the armed ‘self-help’ groups known as the paramilitaries in Colombia and has helped them prosper. The point has been made over and again that the new-age drug cartels behave more like the MNCs than petty criminal organisations. And very much like those MNCs, they have also adopted ‘outsourcing’ as a viable business option. The drug cartel kingpins often hire

⁴ *ibid.*

these paramilitaries to displace poor peasants from their land, to eliminate potential competitors, to fight with the guerrillas and to murder the government officials if they try to threaten the ongoing international business of drug trafficking.

The US counternarcotics policy is also obstructing a true land reform in Colombia. For example, the original draft of Plan Colombia as prepared and proposed by Colombian president Pastrana was reverted by the US. The ultimate version of Plan Colombia as presented by the Clinton administration was essentially military in nature. There was a crucial distinction between the original Plan proposed by Pastrana and the dramatic alterations introduced by Clinton with the proposed US aid package.

The original Plan Colombia not only made no mention of aerial spraying of land used for narcotics crops, but precluded any sort of military intervention in the peace process. Ironically, the two main features of Clinton's Plan Colombia in 1998 have essentially been those two. As the former deputy chief of the American embassy in Bogotá, Robert E. White wrote, "Washington treated Plan Colombia as a bargaining chip that replaced it with just another massive counterinsurgency operation that is already driving Colombia closer to the brink of economic and social chaos."⁵

Actually, the Colombian authors of the Plan have very well understood that the real problem of illicit crops cultivation is closely related to the desperate struggle of poor peasants and landless labourers to survive in a region characterised by total neglect on the part of the government. They have viewed the peace process as a prerequisite for the transformation of Colombian landholding system through widespread land reform. Only a true land reform would have ended the poor peasants' dependence on illicit drug crops. But such a reform would have hampered the neo-liberal agrarian policies proposed by the IMF in Colombia and thus would go against the US interests in the region.

⁵ Marion Maendel, "No to Plan Colombia: Land Reform Essential for Desperate Campesinos," www.cjd.org, dated 7 July 2005.

Powerful industrial, financial and multinational conglomerates such as the *Santodomingo*, *Sindicato Antioqueno*, and *Ardilla Lulle* groups have become “the owners of the largest businesses in the country.”⁶ The acceleration of the neo-liberal economic programme during Gaviria administration proved beyond doubt the extent of their influence in Colombian policy-making.

During the period from late 1980s and the early 1990s, the dramatic reduction of tariffs on imports, through privatisation of state-owned assets, elimination of many protectionist measures of the previous regime and economic integration with the Andean neighbours in order to facilitate free trade—all these were done in accordance with the interests of the neo-liberal economic elite. Thus this elite class was central to the development and success of these neo-liberal reforms, which excluded any kind of land reforms or any other plan to reduce the income inequality.

Another important section of Colombian capitalist class emerged during the early years of the 1980s. This is also an agro-export capitalist class and it behaves the way other agricultural, industrial and financial capitalists do. But there is a marked difference between this particular class and the other capitalists, because the former is attached to the marijuana and cocaine trade. They cannot be called ‘narco-traffickers’ and should not be viewed as mere narco-criminals. Because these narco-entrepreneurs behave like organised business syndicates, and like the MNCs, they are part of an international business, a significant part of which they dominate.

They have invested their accumulated profit from this trade in land, construction, and various other industries and businesses. And they have always tried to become a part of the establishment. For example, the Cali cartel drug lord Gilberto Orejuela built an extensive commercial empire. This at one point of time consisted of a Chrysler dealership, a construction firm, an automobile race track, a network of toy stores, various real estate companies, 28 radio stations, two business schools, and one of Colombia’s

⁶ Aviles, n.2, pp.35-36.

largest bank, the Banco de Trabajadores.⁷ The investment in the construction business made by the Medellin drug kingpins have led to a tremendous building boom in that city. The Colombian narco bourgeoisie have used their wealth to buy extensive rural property like cattle ranches, horse farms, cacao and banana plantations, etc.

The more violent Medellin cartel gave way to more business-like Cali, as has been discussed earlier, and the decline in Cali's importance led to the rise of smaller narco-cartels operating in more organised ways by more educated and sophisticated people into prominence. That is why these baby *cartelios* are much more dangerous than their big brothers. This narco-money is a central factor in Colombia's rates of foreign exchange, inflation and employment. Some of these entrepreneurs also have become the biggest landowners in rural Colombia, often using armed groups to displace poor peasants and concentrate land in fewer hands.

Certain data can be provided to justify the statement that Colombian economy is a highly unequal one. It had actually been a relatively stable and growing economy during the 'lost decade' when other Latin American economies were facing the wrath of debt crisis. Colombia registered annual growth rate averaging 3.3 per cent in the 1980s and this trend continued in the next decade.⁸ The inflation level was relatively stable. Foreign investment was about 4 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the late 1990s. This economic stability accounts for the continuation of the civilian rule and electoral democracy in Colombia. But when it comes to the issue of welfare of the majority of the population, a very different picture can be seen.

According to a mid-1990s estimate, 52 per cent of the population lives below poverty line, unemployment remains around 20 per cent, and 63 per cent of peasant population own less than 5 per cent of the land. A US State Department estimate of 2000 supports these figures. Income-distribution-wise, the poorest 50 per cent of the population receives 17 per cent of the national income, while the wealthiest 20 per cent

⁷ Rensselaer Lee III, "Dimensions of The South American Cocaine Industry," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, (Miami), vol.30, no.1, Summer/Fall 1998, p.90.

⁸ Aviles, n.2, p.36.

receives 55 per cent of it. Moreover, the drug cartel bosses and employees own more than half of Colombia's most productive land.⁹

Speaking about the illegal drugs, for the past 30 years they have played a very crucial role in Colombian economy. They have contributed majorly to changes in institutions and values in Colombian economy, thus indirectly conditioning the country's economic performance.

It all started in the mid-1960s with marijuana production and trafficking in Colombia first in response to the domestic demand, and later the American demand. Marijuana production and trafficking became really important for Colombia when US government promoted eradication programmes in Mexico, resulting in the displacement of marijuana crop to Colombia.

In the late 1970s, the US questioned Colombian president Turbay's anti-drug credentials because of alleged links between his close political allies and narco-traffickers. The Colombian government responded by an aggressive anti-marijuana campaign. Also, a more potent variety of marijuana was discovered in US around that time and thus US started producing marijuana domestically. Thus the marijuana business became less attractive for the Colombian drug lords. But they did not fail to notice the potential illegal sources of wealth. Cocaine took the place of marijuana soon and took almost no time to become the most popular narcotic drug in the history of international drug trafficking.

The role of Colombia in cocaine production, processing, trafficking and marketing has been widely discussed before. It suffices to provide certain related data here. It is difficult to properly estimate the size of the industry given its illegality. However, the most rigorous estimates place total illegal drug value added in the \$2

⁹ *ibid*, p.37.

billion to \$4 billion range in the early and mid-1980s and somewhat less afterward.¹⁰ This was around \$2.5 billion per year during the 1990s, although possible profits repatriated by narco-traffickers abroad must be much more than that.

The value added generated by narco-trafficking in the early 1980s was 7 to 10 per cent of the gross national product (GNP), but by the late 1990s it declined to 3 to 4 per cent.¹¹ So the relative importance of the narcotics industry in Colombian economy was declining. So what has been, and is, the effect of this industry on the Colombian economy?

The illegal drug industry in Colombia is quite capable to change the economic power structure and equations in the country. Revenues and profits from this industry resulted in real estate booms in a few cities and regions in Colombia, revalued the Colombian *peso* and encouraged contraband imports.¹² It was, according to some scholars, the main driving force behind the relative stability of Colombian economy during the 'lost decade'. But later the Colombian economy has had a lot to suffer due to it.

Presently, the Colombian economy is controlled and ruled by a few financial conglomerates. These conglomerates include modern agricultural, financial, manufacturing, marketing, even media organisations. They are losing a lot due to these illegal entrepreneurs. The drug industry has led to a certain "delegitimation of the regime" which, in turn, has contributed to the country's stagnation.¹³

As Francisco E. Thoumi has explained, it has resulted in a sharp decline in trust which "increased transaction costs, contributed to increased violence and impunity that has induced 'clean' capital flight and larger security costs, promoted expectation of very fast wealth accumulation that produced highly speculative investments and increased in

¹⁰ Francisco E. Thoumi, "Illegal Drugs in Colombia: From Illegal Economic Boom to Social Crisis," *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science*, (California), vol.582, July 2002, p.109.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*, p.110.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.111.

bankruptcies, embezzlements, and so forth.”¹⁴ The country’s income growth rate has also suffered its due as a result of increased criminal activities.

These negative effects became far more obvious in the 1990s when narco-money became the main funding source for both the guerrillas and the paramilitaries. Arms trade flourished as a result of this, major portion of which is also illegal. All these undermine the legitimacy of the state as well as the licit economy. This has been really a challenge for the neo-liberal economic conglomerates in Colombia, their political allies and their US ‘gurus’.

Seen in this light, it is not difficult to explain why US is promoting such a large-scale drug war in Colombia. But this is only one aspect of a highly complex story. And it must be remembered that the US neo-liberal market reform strategies in Colombia have unintentionally helped the narco-traffickers who behave more like MNCs these days. Also, the US efforts to strengthen the punitive institutions of Colombian state against the narco-traffickers are disturbing the speed of the neo-liberal market reforms. That is how US policy is at cross-purposes in Colombia. This makes the whole situation more complicated.

But what if the whole narco enterprise would cease to be? It is not to be forgotten at any cost that the cocaine industry spells ‘employment’ for a large chunk of Colombian population. A huge number of people are directly employed in the many phases of the industry—cultivation, processing and refining, transportation and smuggling. The poor farmer of rural Colombia is naturally attracted to coca crop as it provides him with much more profit than any legal crop would have done. The displaced peasants or the landless rural poor can make their both ends meet only because of the narco industry.

There are also incalculable numbers of Colombians in licit occupations who benefit from the multiplier effect of the cocaine industry i.e. by selling goods and services

¹⁴ *ibid.*

to it; such as lawyers, accountants, bankers, pilots, construction workers, chemists etc. All of them receive higher wages or profit than they would in the licit economy.

Also the narco-entrepreneurs, as has been already discussed, invest part of their profit in legal businesses. Among others, agriculture, commerce, real estate and construction industry in particular have benefited from inflows of narco-dollars. And this means more employment for many poor Colombians. Often the narco industry has rescued the poor Colombians when the licit options have failed them.

For instance, in the 1970s the rise of cocaine industry paralleled with the deterioration of Medellín's industrial bases—not so 'coincidentally' the birthplace of one of the two major drug cartels in Colombia so far. As a consequence, the newly rising cocaine succeeded to absorb new elements like "small and medium level industrialists who were bankrupt or almost bankrupt, unemployed professionals, housewives without income, and skilled and unskilled workers."¹⁵

Most crucially, the cocaine led to the emergence of new expectations and aspirations of a radical nature within Colombian society. The new cocaine elite view this business as a route to social power, position and respect. They are by no means 'revolutionaries', rather they constitute a new social class—the 'new illegitimate bourgeoisie' in a society where legitimate economic opportunities are monopolized by few traditionally wealthy and established families, dominated by foreign capital or circumscribed by the government.¹⁶

Drug bosses like Pablo Escobar have always claimed that they represent the purest form of rags-to-riches capitalism. Carlos Lehder, the mastermind behind Medellín cartel, even considered cocaine and marijuana to be 'revolutionary weapons' against North American imperialism. But these drug bosses are nowhere near being a 'revolutionary', although they have become cult figures in society. They constitute a

¹⁵ Lee III, n.7, p.91.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

business elite class, pure and simple. Only, their type of business have not been 'legalised' so far.

It is true that cocaine and other narcotic drugs have never been able to generate an economic miracle. But it has been a major support for the faltering economic growth in Colombia. Most importantly, perhaps, they have created new patterns of interest articulation and generated new demands in Colombian political system through raising expectations and transforming life styles.¹⁷ More about it will be discussed in a later section that will discuss about the impact of narco-trafficking as well as 'war on drugs' on Colombian society and law and order.

Colombian Politics, Narco-trafficking and The 'War on Drugs'

Like Colombian economy, Colombian politics is also exclusionary in character. A bipartisan political system throughout the Colombian history has excluded alternative actors not only politically, but also economically and socially. And like the few families who monopolize the economy of the country, there is a traditional conservative elite group who virtually monopolizes the political power.

The political elite is institutionally as well as interpersonally connected with the economic elite. Moreover, both of them enjoy close ties with the armed forces of the country. And all of them are in favour of such an exclusionary political system. This factor explains why in Colombian politics there are two different sets of extreme actors. On one hand there is the ruling elite, who also enjoy both direct and indirect support from the US. On the other hand, there are the guerrillas who consider themselves as 'revolutionaries' and present themselves as an alternative to the established governing class.

There are other non-state actors as well who also constitute alternative sources of power in Colombia, such as the armed 'self-help' groups, the paramilitary squads and the

¹⁷ *ibid*, p.93.

narco-traffickers. One unique feature of Colombian politics is that most of these non-state actors, barring the guerrillas, operate within the democratic system and in close connection with the legitimised governing class. The Colombian state also deals with them differently from the guerrillas. More about these non-state actors will be discussed later in a separate section of this chapter.

The guerrillas have succeeded in building a popular support base, particularly widespread in rural Colombia, and they control a considerable part of the country. Thus in some part of Colombia these guerrillas are de-facto rulers. They have created a virtual 'state within state' and they are continuously at war with the punitive forces of the de-jure Colombian government and their paramilitary allies. A huge chunk of US counter-narcotics aid to Colombia—be it technology, arms or monetary resources—goes to fight these guerrillas who in turn finance their war efforts by narco-money.

Traditionally, the narco-bourgeoisie and the guerrillas are sworn enemies of each other. And not all the guerrilla groups finance themselves by narco-trafficking. For example, the ELN guerrillas distance themselves from it. But the FARC, the most important among Colombian guerrilla groups, directly participates in coca cultivation, processing, production and smuggling of cocaine and other narcotics.

The narco-bourgeoisie, however, uses its own armed guards or paramilitary squads to counter the guerrillas. In certain areas of coca cultivation, the guerrillas control the coca-growing peasants and the narco-bourgeoisie control the production and smuggling of the refined drug. Thus the self-interests of the guerrillas and the narco-bourgeoisie often clash and in many coca-growing areas of Colombia, they have become the 'sworn enemies' of each other.

This narco-bourgeoisie is also attached to the political elite of Colombia. The alleged linkage of Colombian politicians with drug traffickers became international concern during the Samper administration, when it was revealed by the US that the Cali cartel had financed Samper's presidential campaign. Colombian political elite has

actually never been dead against narco-trafficking, what it opposes is narco-terrorism. It has been the US pressure that has made the Colombian governments to comply with US's supply side counternarcotics offensives in Colombia.

These are grossly the dominant forces in Colombian politics at present. But to understand Colombian politics, its past has to be examined. Colombia has a bipartisan political system, created as early as the mid-1880s, constituting of the Liberals and the Conservatives. Both of them are elite-controlled parties, their mutual differences being issue-specific. This system, in effect, constrained the development of class-based political organisations by accommodating diverse interests prevailed in the Colombian society within the bipartisan structure.

Another important feature of the Colombian politics is the use of violence inherent in it. Violence is the source of party strength and consolidation in Colombian politics. It started with the War of a Thousand Days (1895-1902) that was an obvious consequence of inter-party conflict, resulting in the death of 100,000 people and economic collapse. The 'War' ended in 1902, but civil war-like situation went on till the early 1930s. In 1934, Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo was elected as the president. His rise to power signified the emergence of a Liberal anti-elite aspiring the eradication of the traditional oligarchic regime and the adaptation of the state to the changing internal socio-economic situation.

The projects of Lopez government were agrarian reform, labour legislation, expansion of state control in economy and state secularisation.¹⁸ It amounted to a threat to the existing regime. Soon the progressive sector of the Liberal party abandoned these issues and settled for limited reforms. Majority of the Colombians excluded by the bipartisan system was utterly frustrated at this policy of "setting the clock back". It ultimately led to the outbreak of 'La Violencia' (1948-1957).

¹⁸ Arlene B. Tickner, "Colombia: Chronicle of A Crisis Foretold," *Current History*, (Philadelphia), vol.97, no.618, February 1998, p.61.

The conflict soon acquired a class-oriented dynamic and was fuelled by regional political leaders from both parties as well as the Roman Catholic Church, leaving as many as 300,000 dead in those nine years.¹⁹ In 1953, in a bid to stop this ongoing large-scale butchery of the masses, military leader General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla took over the state power with the help of the Liberals and a significant number of Conservatives.

Rojas Pinilla tried to establish an autonomous political system, independent of the existing bipartisan regime, and sought widespread reforming measures including land reform, which led to his ouster in 1957. Both the parties were behind this and in 1958 they joined hands to create the National Front.

The Liberals and the Conservatives agreed to alternate the presidency and share the remaining power proportionally. This paved the way for establishing democracy and ended the ongoing violence. But the root socio-economic causes of this upheaval were left untouched. As a result, those left outside the political regime started desperately searching for an alternative to this traditional oligarchic regime. These searches led to the consolidation of numerous guerrilla movements in the 1960s, the emergence of narco-trafficking in the 1970s (marijuana) and 1980s (cocaine) and paramilitary groups in the 1980s and 1990s.²⁰

To take a break from this historical narrative, the cocaine politics of Colombia can be discussed here. The guerrilla and paramilitary groups will be discussed in detail later. Already a lot has been said about the narco-traffickers and their role in Colombia-US relationship, as well as Colombian political economy in previous chapters. Therefore, a summary discussion of these actors will suffice.

For the last two to three decades, a thriving cocaine (and other narcotic drugs) industry and an increasingly militarised US policy to suppress it have been transforming

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.62. Cocaine boom started in the 1970s, but it reached such importance in the 1980s.

Colombian politics and economy.²¹ Foreign debt, economic crisis, civilian-military relations, human rights, democratisation, guerrilla insurgencies, neo-liberal reforms—all major economic and political issues in Colombia have been influenced and shaped by this factor.

The profits from this business have led to the emergence of a new class of entrepreneurs, who have turned to violence and corruption as necessary tactics to run their illegal business. These are nothing more than ‘occupational hazards’ for the narco-bourgeoisie. But these have had a profound impact on Colombian politics, society and economy, as obvious.

Sometimes like the guerrillas this narco-bourgeoisie also throws a direct challenge to the state. Simultaneously, they enjoy a deep-rooted connection with the political and economic elite of the country. This elite class is also not profoundly against the existing regime in Colombia. They do not aspire to change the system. What they want is to gain power and position within the existing exclusionary system. They throw a challenge to it only when they fail to get the recognition from the existing regime they are craving for.

Drug money is the main financial source for both the guerrillas and the paramilitaries. When cocaine revenues are welcome to stabilise Colombian economy, the drug-financed terrorism directed against the state is not. The US counternarcotics aid to Colombia mainly goes to fight the leftist insurgency groups. So does the Colombian army, which is much more committed to fight the guerrillas than the narco-traffickers, the latter being considered by the military forces as ‘allies’ in the war against the guerrillas. This is basically a ‘marriage of convenience’.

For example, US congressional investigators were informed by highly placed Colombian military officials in 1990 that of \$40.2 million in counternarcotics military aid for that year, \$38.5 million was to be used for a major counter insurgency campaign in an

²¹ Peter R. Andreas and Kenneth E. Sharpe, “Cocaine Politics in The Andes”, *Current History*, (Philadelphia), vol.91, no.562, February 1992, p.74.

area not known for drug trafficking.²² In spite of this information, the US counter-narcotics aid to Colombia grew in the coming years and this aid remained to be primarily military in nature.

To resume the historical account of Colombian politics once again, a constitutional assembly was convened in the early 1990s in Colombia to create a new constitution in order to replace the 1886 constitution. It was assumed that the National Front failed to take care of political problems and so a new base is required for the legitimisation of the ruling elite amidst the threat from alternative actors. The 1991 constitution also aimed to increase the participation of the civil society in policy-making, to incorporate previously marginalized groups such as indigenous and black communities and to bring armed forces under civilian control.²³

The new constitution and the elections during 1990-91 made it appear that the bipartisan exclusionary system is changing, slowly but surely. More so was felt due to the brief political success of AD M-19, a party born out of the incorporation of the M-19 urban guerrilla movement into mainstream politics. But soon the traditional parties regained their previous dominance with the 1994 elections.

What the 1991 constitution actually did was to secure and formalise the implementation of neo-liberal economic model in Colombia. It did so by increasing the executive power at the cost of the legislature and the judiciary and by concentrating macro-economic planning in the hands of few technocrats, thus denying the effective participation of Colombian civil society.²⁴

These neo-liberal reforms led to a growth in unemployment, underemployment, poverty, inequality, agrarian crisis etc. There were signs of recovery from 1997, but a widespread reform has so far been unachieved and probably unintended for. Military power in the political sphere increased as a result of continuous 'war on drugs'. Though

²² *ibid*, p.79.

²³ Tickner, n.18, p.62.

²⁴ *ibid*.

Colombia has the least number of military coups among Latin American countries, the armed forces enjoy considerable de-facto power like their neighbouring counterparts.

Thus there has never been a very active civil society in Colombia. Historically, common Colombians are known for their tremendous capacity of resistance in the face of recurrent violence, corruption, inequality and injustice. Of late this resistance has been transformed into resignation.²⁵

Colombian Society, Law and Order: The Impact of Narco-trafficking and The 'War on Drugs'

To understand the impact of both Narcotrafficking and the 'war on drugs' on Colombian society and the social reaction towards the same, it is necessary to discuss the ethnic character of the Colombian population and the geographical factors that have shaped the Colombian demography. Along with the socio-economic factors, these aspects also influence the very nature of a society.

Colombia has always been a homogeneous nation, even in the colonial times. There was no large ethnic mosaic of a population in Colombia like Bolivia, Peru, Mexico or Ecuador ever. Nor has Colombia experienced any large-scale immigration, which often redefines the national character, such as in the US, Brazil or Argentina.²⁶ One common language (Spanish) and adherence to one common religion (Roman Catholicism) increased this ethnic sense of oneness. Colombia has little history of separatism, Panama being the only exception.

But the rugged topography of the country and its most dispersed population due to that have always made the observers conclude that given the geographical aloofness, there must be a separatism underlying the surface oneness. However, in spite of the late

²⁵ *ibid*, p.65.

²⁶ Eduardo Posada-Carbo, "Colombia's Resilient Democracy", *Current History*, (Philadelphia), February 2004, vol.103, no.688, p.72.

development of means of transport, different Colombian regions were never really isolated from each other. Today they are even more integrated, thanks to the national economy of coffee and, despite both Colombian and US claims on the opposite, cocaine.

Fragmented geography has, however, impeded the concentration of power in the hands of a union government. A federal government in Colombia was established as a result of this. This fragmented power is also a central factor behind the rise and nourishment of a liberal democracy in Colombia. Power was also fragmented by a constitutional organisation founded on a division among the executive, legislature and judiciary, prevailing since independence.²⁷

The Colombian Congress, which has perhaps the longest life in the whole Latin America, has always exercised its power and position as separate from that of the President. There also exists an independent and powerful judiciary in Colombia and the rule of the law prevails. An independent and free press does exist to play its due role. Power has also been limited in Colombia through the democratic elections that have been the prevailing norm in Colombia since the 1830s. And there is a law that bars the presidents from being re-elected. At present there is a tussle going on between the current Colombian president Uribe and the Inspector General of the country regarding a bill that seeks to change that very law. But it seems that it may not be possible for Uribe to run for a second term, in spite of all his popularity in the ruling circle.

Given such a democratic base, it seems really shocking that Colombia is going through a near civil war situation for more than four decades. But the previous discussion of the political and economic scenario of the country explains the reasons behind that. In this section, a very unique feature of Colombia should be highlighted. It is the different understanding of rule of law in Colombia that demands a researcher's attention above all while discussing the law and order situation in Colombia.

²⁷ *ibid*, p.72.

Law plays a central role in Colombian public life. The legalistic language has been the primary and often the exclusive way of expressing their demands and justifications for many Colombian social actors including the armed groups and drug traffickers.²⁸ But it will be misleading to assume that Colombia presents just another case of the Latin American tradition of a weak judiciary confronting the armed non-state actors. Rather in Colombia there exists a unique combination of an impressive stability of institutional macro forms and an almost permanent state of internal war with violations of rights.²⁹

In Colombia respect for and obedience to the rule of law have been the strongest feature of the society. But unlike the other countries in the continent, in Colombia the anti-democratic forces are thoroughly trained in juridical techniques and rhetoric, and they know it very well how to operate from within the rule of law. Two most important differences between Colombian situation and that of the other Latin American countries should be discussed here briefly to establish the point made so far.

During the 1990s, the so-called democratic transition process in most of Latin America was disturbed seriously by a set of constitutional reforms amounting a weakening of democracy and the rule of law in Argentina, Peru, Brazil, Ecuador, and Venezuela.³⁰ However, Colombia did not experience any institutional collapse in spite of the more serious problems, even a narco-corruption scandal involving the President (Samper) and a significant section of the ruling elite. Instead of any violent outcome of the narco-crisis, the Colombian Congress simply ordered that president Samper should be judged juridically and not politically. Samper was cleared of all the allegations though some of his close advisors were put behind the bars and a political upheaval was avoided easily. Thus the law was violated from very much within the legal framework, as the law itself protected the people responsible for violating it.

²⁸ Francisco Gutierrez Sanin, "The Courtroom and the Bivouac: Reflections on Law and Violence in Colombia", Richard Stoller, trans., *Latin American Perspectives*, vol.28, no.1, January 2001, (Thousand Oaks), p.56.

²⁹ *ibid*, p.59.

³⁰ *ibid*.

The issue of protecting the citizens' rights is the second case of difference. In many Latin American countries, state punitive forces have often been a party to criminal violence as in Colombia. But in the case of judicial reforms concerning the impunity of these forces, Colombia differs from Brazil or Peru. The state terrorism in Colombia has always been within the framework of 'rule of law'. The army and the police forces in Colombia, accused of gross violation of human rights, do not have to hide behind any *greater cause* such as the war against communism or internal security; but behind the procedural exigencies of *due process*.³¹

As a result of this, neither the majority of those responsible for the violation of human rights have been punished or even named, nor the public opinion have got the opportunity to measure the actual damage done. Because while, for example, in Argentina or Chile the facts were known though the guilty not punished, in Colombia even the truth never saw daylight. Cases after case are being filed everyday in Colombian courts and an independent judiciary, which is also a big recipient of the US counternarcotics aid to Colombia like the army, is prospering in the real sense of the term. Only justice is never bestowed on the common people who need the protection of law much more than the ruling elite or the armed groups.

Colombia is facing an institutional crisis for last five decades or more. This crisis is characterised by extremely low level of social capital and trust. In Colombia, the society imposes very few customs and norms and lacks the necessary power to control the individuals. Colombia is thus a country of "individual creativity and social indiscipline."³² And this socio-institutional crisis in Colombia has been aggravated further by the 'war on drugs'.

The weak government in Colombia has more in its hands than it can possibly handle. Very rapid urbanisation; land reforms, education and tax reforms; great pressures to provide housing and health services; responsibility to promote food production and

³¹ *ibid*, p.60.

³² Thoumi, n.10, p.112.

create infrastructure—all these and much more have been confronting the government for a long period. Therefore, individual drug addiction was (and still is) a very low priority issue on the Colombian government's agenda.³³ It is perceived more as a personal problem. If drug war is a foreign problem, why should the Colombians fight the same? The “dirty war” involving the army, the left wing guerrillas and the right wing paramilitaries is much more crucial and *real* for the government as well as the common Colombian.

The foreign pressure to comply with the US ‘war on drugs’ strategies has made the Colombian governments to adopt repressive measures against narco-trafficking. The narcotic crop eradication programme has gravely affected the poor peasants and landless labourers and caused environmental disasters. Extraditing the drug traffickers to the US has given birth to a nation-wide protest. Attack on the narco business has resulted in loss of revenue and rise in the rate of unemployment. And the huge US counternarcotics aid, being mostly military in nature, has strengthened the Colombian army vis-à-vis the civilian government.

Side by side, the narco economy has a great impact on the Colombian social character. Coca cultivators and labourers have emerged as a new social class.³⁴ They are a new labour class perpetually at the mercy of both the traffickers and the law enforcement agencies. There has also emerged a small petty middle class that is involved in the various stages of the narco enterprise. This middle class is mainly engaged in the entrepreneurial and managerial side of the narco business. The emergence of a new narco bourgeoisie has already been discussed in a previous section of this chapter.

All these new social classes are imbued with urban consumerist culture and their lifestyle now involves drug addiction and criminal activities related to the drug trade. In such a situation, the US policy of declaring drug wars and giving away the huge military aid to Colombia have resulted in the explicit militarisation of Colombian society, thereby

³³ *ibid*, p.113.

³⁴ Abdul Nafey, “Narco-trafficking in the Andean Region”, *Journal of Peace studies*, (New Delhi), vol.3, no.15, March-April 1996, p.29.

weakening its very base. The role of the most prevalent non-state actors of Colombia in such a society given the already discussed politico-economic situation will be analysed in detail in the following section.

Guerrillas, Paramilitaries and Armed Forces: The Political Violence in Colombia

Guerrillas, paramilitaries or *paras* and armed forces are three major non-state socio-political actors in Colombia. None of these groups are homogenous, but for the sake of the present discussion certain general features of these groups will be mentioned here. After the basic features are discussed, the role of these actors in Colombia along with the narco-traffickers will be analysed.

There are different major and minor guerrilla groups operating in Colombia with different roots, backgrounds and ideologies. Two major groups, namely the FARC and the M-19, can be taken as examples to show the differences in origin and goals of these different guerrilla groups. The FARC is the most powerful among the guerrilla groups in Colombia confronting the neo-liberal regime and its US supporters. FARC constitutes of approximately 18,000 fighters who are mostly peasants.³⁵ It has a wide rural base with urban militia units in most major cities and towns. It is a “people’s army” in the true sense of the term as it enjoys profound roots in the Colombian countryside, where it represents the state power vis-à-vis the Bogotá-based ruling elite.

Under the leadership of Manuel Marulanda the FARC emerged as a guerrilla group in 1964 from a peasant movement. As a protest against the destruction of their villages and crops by the military and as the only means left to save themselves from the brutal attack of the armed forces, the peasant communities regrouped and formed the

³⁵ James Petras, “The FARC Faces The Empire,” *Latin American Perspectives*, (Thousand Oaks), vol.27, no.5, September 2000, p.134.

nucleus of what is known today as the most powerful guerrilla army of the continent. This group enjoys close relations with the Colombian Communist party.

The main issues, for which the FARC guerrillas are fighting the Colombian state and its foreign collaborators, are: land reform, end of foreign control on strategic sectors of Colombian economy such as oil, true democratisation meaning the end of the Liberal-Conservative monopoly of political power, and protection of citizens' human rights by dismantling the military-landlord-controlled paramilitary groups.³⁶ The FARC's so-declared set of socio-economic reforms runs counter to the neo-liberal agenda designed by the US and implemented by the Colombian ruling elite.

On the other hand, the M-19 guerrilla group, which later became a democratic political party named AD M-19, was in essence an urban guerrilla group. M-19, unlike the other Colombian guerrilla groups, was not influenced by any form of Marxist ideology. Rather the central issue for it was democracy. Its origins can be traced back to the 1970 presidential elections when the Conservative candidate Misael Pastrana defeated the former dictator and populist leader General Rojas Pinilla.³⁷ This group wanted to open up the bipartisan exclusionary political system of Colombia.

As a result of the peace process between the Colombian government and some of the major guerrilla groups in the late 1980s, the M-19 guerrilla group became a political party. It became AD M-19 in the early 1990 when a number of popular movements and organisations joined the newly formed party. Together they presented themselves as an alternative to the Liberal-Conservative ruling elite under the charismatic leadership of Carlos Pizarro.

The M-19 leaders did not have any clear idea from the very beginning of how to build a political party. For many of them, including the later chief Navarro, war was easier than peace. The murder of Pizarro on April 26, 1990 came at a time when the party

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ Lawrence Boudon, "Colombia's M-19 Democratic Alliance: A Case Study in New-party Self-destruction", *Latin American Perspectives*, (Thousand Oaks), vol.28, no.1, January 2001, p.76.

was struggling to carve out a space of its own in the bipartisan exclusionary political system of Colombia. A political analyst commented at the time: “alongside the body of the M-19 chief lay also the body of that project”.³⁸ Pizarro’s successor, Navarro lacked his predecessor’s charisma and was more a pragmatist leader than an ideologue. He was more interested in the elections than building up the strength of the party.

The unity the AD M-19 showed during the Constituent assembly (that prepared the draft of the 1991 constitution) began to dissolve from the late 1991. Internal drifts started widening as the differences in opinion over the party’s direction became more entrenched. To save the party from destruction, Navarro went on to create a new organisational backbone for it. But it could not prevent the opening of real fissures within AD M-19. These internal as well as some external factors, such as the initial successes of Gaviria’s neo-liberal economic programme and political violence, soon spelt failure for AD M-19 as a political entity.

Thus, the guerrilla groups of Colombia differ from one another in their basic nature, operational system, ideology and character. They fight for different causes and in different ways. For example, while the FARC has adopted the course of armed struggle, the M-19 has tried a political strategy to reach its goals. Again, not all of them are related to narco-trafficking as claimed by the US. Even the FARC, that has been the main target of US criticism, claims that it does protect the interests of the coca-growing peasants and taxes the purchasers, but neither sells nor produces cocaine or other narcotic drugs, a claim admitted as a fact by the ex-president of Colombia, Andres Pastrana. And there are groups like ELN that constantly distance themselves from anything related to narcotics.

The issues hailed by the Colombian guerrillas are: agrarian reform, nationalisation of domestic economic sectors now in foreign control, to widen the scope of political participation by putting an end to the Liberal-Conservative elite monopoly and protect the human rights. They recognise themselves as ‘real revolutionaries’. So far they have succeeded to control certain parts of the country, undermining the legitimacy of those

³⁸ Quoted in *ibid*, p.77.

currently in power by presenting themselves as political alternatives in front of the Colombian masses.

The human rights records of the guerrillas, however, are not spotless. Moreover, to a significant extent they have contributed to the current instability of the Colombian state and the civil warlike situation. But continuing a war against the guerrillas, as proposed and supported by the US, will not solve the problem. Land reform, inclusion of previously marginalized groups into the mainstream politics, enhancement of civilian control over the armed forces and a real democratisation of the institutions can pave the way for a peace process with the guerrillas, which would stabilise the country's situation in turn.

The armed forces of Colombia, however, are not in favour of such a peace process. They are being supported by the US unconditionally on this issue. It is true that Colombia has had very few military coups. But it is also true that the armed forces in Colombia are cordially connected with the governing political and economic elite of the country and they know very well how to protect their vested interests 'within the rule of law'. And it is to be noted that military administrations in Colombia have been less dictatorial than their civilian counterparts.

The Colombian business and landowning elites have been the main strength of the armed forces. Historically, the armed forces of Colombia were created to guard the interests of the dominant classes. The Chilean mission, sent to Colombia in 1907 to set up the first military school, had that very end in sight.³⁹ The 1940s and early 1950s experienced the expansion of the role of the armed forces in Colombian state system and society, when these forces engaged themselves in *La Violencia*. The military became the frontline agency in the internal mission of founding law and order rather than dealing with the external threats to Colombian security.

³⁹ Aviles, n.2, p.37.

During this period, the ruling Conservatives often used the military to eliminate their Liberal enemies. It led to an increase in the power of the army and culminated in the Rojas Pinilla coup of 1953. The series of reforms initiated by General Rojas Pinilla threatened the existing political and economic system in the country, and the National Front was created after his removal in 1957. The military now refocused on its own professionalization.

The prevalence of guerrilla warfare in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s once again emphasised the role of the armed forces in establishing internal law and order. There did exist (as still does) a faction within the armed forces who opposed the use of coercive strategies by the state against its own citizens. But they were soon marginalized and in most cases thrown out of the forces. Moreover, most of the Colombian army officers have received training in the military school in US, the SOA, and they are the biggest supporters of the US counternarcotics strategy in Colombia.

The national security doctrine of the Colombian armed forces has focused on the maintenance of internal order and the defence of the “national interest.”⁴⁰ They enjoy a strong adherence to the counterinsurgency doctrine that had been promoted by the US in the 1960s. This policy was strongly backed by the ruling political as well as economic elite who gave the military a free hand in its war against the Marxist insurgents.

The increasing militarisation of the ‘war on drugs’ by the US is an important source of support for the Colombian military’s autonomy and a militarist solution of the conflict.⁴¹ The armed forces in Colombia use the US anti-drug aid mainly to counter the guerrilla insurgents. Not only that, civic union leaders, leftist politicians, teachers, health workers, human rights groups and NGOs working in rural Colombia—all of them bear the wrath of the armed forces. The human rights records of the army have become a major international concern. And these records that are available should be considered only a tip of the proverbial iceberg.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p.38.

⁴¹ *ibid*, p.39.

Important sectors of Colombian economic elite class have also supported the maintenance of a militarist counterinsurgency policy by directly subsidising and training paramilitary and death squads.⁴² The *paras* in Colombia, like the guerrillas, have different origins. Some of them started as 'self-defence' groups, while some were employed by drug cartel bosses, big landowners, ranchers etc. to save their property and family. The paramilitary groups are very much like the civilian defence groups, only more aggressive in nature. They were created and legalised in the 1980s mainly to combat the guerrillas.

Paras enjoy close connection with the armed forces and are informal recipients of US counternarcotics aid. Also, they receive monetary help from the economic elites. Moreover, they earn enough money by actively participating in narco-trafficking. The human rights records of these groups, known more widely as 'death squads' are worse than even the armed forces. Their presence has severely undermined any peace negotiation with the guerrillas.

According to Human Rights Watch, the paramilitary forces commit 76 per cent of human rights abuses in Colombia; while the estimate made by the Colombian Commission of Jurists shows that 70 per cent of the political assassinations in Colombia are done either by these groups or the armed forces.⁴³ In 1995, the United Self-Defence Force of Colombia, known more popularly by its Spanish acronym AUC, was established to consolidate the different paramilitary squads under one umbrella.

International pressure has made the governing class to initiate a peace process with the *paras* in Colombia. But this peace process is now on the brink of collapse. Peace talks with the AUC, most important among the paramilitary groups, are producing no optimistic results even after the four decades of 'dirty war'. This is a major failure of the present pro-US Uribe government in Colombia. The irony is, even the US is sceptical

⁴² *ibid*, p.43.

⁴³ Tickner, n.18, p.63.

about the outcome of these peace talks. But the US mainly criticises the AUC for its alleged interest in drug smuggling and narco-terrorism, not for the human rights violations. The root causes of the whole disturbance and instability, however, are being left untouched.

Drug trafficking also has its share in the ongoing violence in Colombia. Guerrillas, paras, armed forces and common criminals join the drug capos in the creation of a nexus responsible for the large-scale human rights violations in the country. According to estimates prepared by the Colombian Commission of Jurists and the US-based Washington Office on Latin America, 26,778 homicides were committed in 1996.⁴⁴ More than one million of civilians were displaced due to “dirty war” in Colombia since 1985.

The Impact of The ‘War on Drugs’ on Colombia

A recent White House report has shown that so far US counternarcotics strategy has failed to produce optimistic results in Colombia. Even a massive aerial spraying offensive in 2004 failed to dent the coca cultivating area in Colombia.⁴⁵ Still the current Colombian president Alvaro Uribe has vowed to go ahead with the US drug war.

Since 2000, the ‘war on drugs’ in Colombia has cost more than \$3 billion in US aid only in four years. But it seems that it was also in vain as the prices of cocaine and heroin have been continuously dropping over the years in US. This indicates that the supply of narcotics has not been diminished.⁴⁶ Critics are now saying that considering the current reports it is pretty clear that both Colombia and the US are losing the war.

But what has been the impact of this war? In case of the US, a public sentiment in favour of treating the drug problem as a health and not a criminal issue is being formed. Even some are articulating a case in favour of the legalisation of these drugs, pointing out

⁴⁴ *ibid*, p.63.

⁴⁵ A Report on Colombia Drug War Failing, available at www.cnn.worldnews.com, dated 2 April 2005.

⁴⁶ *ibid*.

the fact that the death toll caused by smoking and drinking are much higher than these narcotic substances. US drug war, both demand side and supply side, is being widely questioned by its own citizens who are often comparing the futility of the drug war with the Vietnam war. In case of Colombia, however, the drug war has given birth to a much more crucial problem. It has fuelled up the instability of Colombian society, thereby putting the legitimacy of the Colombian state in question.

First of all, the US counter-narcotics aid to Colombia is primarily military in nature. This 'militarised' policy of US has strengthened the Colombian armed forces vis-à-vis the other actors in Colombian society. This has a profound impact on civil-military relationship in that country.

The armed forces now have a greater say in the governance of the country. This has weakened the civilian control on governance. Moreover, the Colombian armed forces along with the *paras* have one of the worst human rights records in the region. And the US knows that very well, even officially. But its support to the Colombian military has neither stopped nor even reduced.

A real life incident can be sighted here. On January 28, 1992, Jorge Gomez Lizarazo wrote in 'The New York Times', that the US is practically financing a political war in Colombia and ignoring completely the tortures and murders of the civilians committed by the Colombian military. Jorge is a human rights activist. The next day his secretary was gunned down and the murderer ran away. The usual police patrols of the area were nowhere to be found. And shortly after the murder, the army commander of Barrancabermeja's Fifth Brigade told reporters that the human rights office was a front for "subversives" engaged in a "tricky scheme" to deface the military.⁴⁷

This is just a single case. But it nevertheless shows the precarious situation in Colombia. The army, the police and the *paras* are killing peasants, union workers, human

⁴⁷ Robert Emmet Long, ed., *Drugs in America*, (New York, 1993), p.69.

rights workers, and progressive political leaders all throughout Colombia. Amnesty International and individual human rights workers have documented Colombian armed forces' involvement in these murders. Still the US government is saying Colombian military must be funded in order to fight the 'war on drugs'.

And the Colombian government, instead of protecting its own citizens, supports these armed forces in their violation of human rights. The 1991 constitution has expanded a system of military impunity by including the police into it. This system is protecting these forces from retribution for human rights abuses.

Economically also, the 'war on drugs' has produced negative results for Colombia. It has been discussed before how the neo-liberal reforms have strengthened the roots of inequality in Colombia. The neo-liberal elite and their US supporters are opposed to the illegal narco-business that undermines the economic credibility of Colombia for obvious reasons. The US drug war strategies, however, have failed to bring any positive results. Rather it has led to the displacement of poor peasants, who have engaged themselves more and more in coca and poppy cultivation to recover the financial loss.

Unless and until the national governments commit themselves to agrarian reforms, providing the poor peasants with alternative crops and agricultural finance, the poor peasants will never stop cultivating these narcotic crops that bring them easy money. It is not possible for the Colombian government to commit itself to such a programme, even with best intentions, due to its weak economy. And the US economic aid to Colombia, compared to its counternarcotics aid, has been scanty.

This 'war on drugs' has also been a major cause behind the 'weaponisation' of Colombian society. US arms come to Colombia as part of the US counternarcotics aid in huge numbers. The armed forces receive these arms primarily, but soon these arms (specially small ones) are handed over to the paramilitaries and from them to the common public. Colombian society has a strong tradition of violence. This arms proliferation has

further ignited that inherent violence leading to a mounting social tension and lack of trust.

The 'war on drugs' is perceived by the common Colombians as basically a 'foreign' problem, not their own. The priority for the Colombian government is also narco terrorism, not narco-trafficking. And the priority of the armed forces is to fight the 'insurgents', not the narco-traffickers. As a result, all Colombians see the 'war on drugs' as something imposed by the US on them. This, on one hand, explains the lack of popular support for the drug war in Colombia. On the other hand, it fuels social tension, thereby instabilising the Colombian society further.

The social and economic tensions have put the legitimacy of the Colombian government in question. The legitimacy has further been eroded by the US presence in the Colombian territory. A significant number of US anti-drug agents are operating throughout the country. US army personnel are also present in Colombia to train the Colombian armed forces. US business presence in Colombian economy, especially in oil sector, adds to its political and military presence. It is not very difficult for even a layperson to sense the US predominance in Colombian domestic decision-making. This undermines Colombian sovereignty, thereby weakening the very base of Colombian state.

The US officials always say that the Colombian situation is *very complex*. There are many different factors contributing to the violence, such as drug lords, paramilitary death squads, common criminals, so on and so forth. But the reality behind the rhetoric about national security and narco terrorism is clear. The political and economic injustices in Colombia have become international concern. The stark contrast between the rich and the poor has given birth to a desperate struggle for economic necessities and social justice by the 'subversive' side against the rich and powerful, and this is the *real war* in Colombia.⁴⁸ And it is not difficult to understand which side the US is on.

Summary and Conclusion

⁴⁸ *ibid*, p.82.

This chapter has discussed the impact of 'war on drugs' on different aspects of Colombian state and society at length. With a broad overview given in the beginning, it went on describing and analysing the repercussions of the drug war on Colombian economy, politics, society and law and order separately, along with the discussion of their basic nature. An analysis of the prevailing non-state actors in Colombian society has also been provided in a separate section. And in the end, a collective study of the total impact of the 'war on drugs' on Colombia has been given.

This chapter is a logical culmination of the previous chapters of this paper. While the first chapter of this paper has provided a broad overview of the whole issue of Colombia-US relationship in the context of 'war on drugs', the following two chapters have dealt with the counternarcotics strategy of both Colombia and the US over the years in detail.

After discussing the plan, programme and strategies of both the countries regarding the drug war, it was necessary to deal with its repercussions on Colombia that is at the receiving end in this war. In connection with that, the more complex issues of Colombian state and society, which have complicated the 'war on drugs' in their turn and vice versa, have also been discussed in the present chapter.

The issue of the 'war on drugs', therefore, has been discussed and analysed from all relevant dimensions so far. In the next chapter, which is also the final chapter of this paper, the basic nature of the 'war on drugs' will be dealt with briefly. More stress will be given on the inherent flaws of the war. And the potential US objectives behind the 'war on drugs' will also be analysed. It will also try to find out the stake of Colombian governing elite, who is complying in every possible way with the US counternarcotics strategies on their own soil, in this war.

CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER V

Summary and Conclusions

As the discussion in the preceding chapters makes it clear, successive US administrations from presidents Ronald Reagan to George Bush and then to Bill Clinton pursued policies that increasingly militarised the ‘war on drugs’ in Latin America and the Caribbean countries, importantly in Colombia. The administration of president George W. Bush (2000—present) is continuing with the same strategy and goals, even using the same tactics. In other words, the goals, ideology and rhetoric of the US ‘war on drugs’ remain the same, without either the problem of trafficking showing some decline or much less any early prospects of end to the ‘war on drugs’. To the contrary, with the ‘war on drugs’ getting linked to the US ‘war on terrorism’, one can simply rule out an early end to the ‘war on drugs’.

With trans-national terrorism posing probably the most potent threat to internal and external peace and security of a state nowadays, the ‘war on drugs’ has simply acquired a new rationale and justification for a militarised approach. The rise of the ‘neo-conservatives’ and their growing influence in the US administration have gone in favour of the escalation of the ‘war on drugs’ in the Andean countries. Besides, as has been discussed and described in previous chapters, the neo-liberal economic model, preached by the US especially to the Latin American countries, demands, in its logic, an end to the illegal drugs trade for obvious business and economic reasons.

Be that as it may, the escalation of the ‘war on drugs’, however, has proved to be fatal for Colombia—its security, political stability and prospects of democracy, economic development, and social peace and harmony. Colombia has had so far an exclusionary bi-partisan political system, an elite-dominated economic system, and a social order that has ignored the existence of a considerate section of the society. The escalation of ‘war on drugs’ has succeeded in militarising the Colombian society, intensified economic and social inequalities and oppression, retarded prospects of a meaningful democracy and,

above all, has deeply entrenched all forms of violence in the body politic and the society at large. The establishment of a neo-liberal economy has further aggravated the problems, as it has led to more unemployment, unequal income distribution, and concentration of wealth in fewer hands, thus giving birth to more potent social inequality. Most of all, it has deeply entrenched the elitist and authoritarian character of the two-party rule.

All these have been discussed and analysed in detail in the previous chapters of the present study. To summarise and recapitulate the discussion, the first chapter has, by way of background, provided an overview of the various issues and dimensions involved in the US 'war on drugs' in Colombia and its impact on Colombian state and society. Such an overview of the whole problem and its various dimensions have been further elaborated and analysed in the succeeding chapters.

The second chapter of the monograph has looked into the so-called demand side of the narco-trafficking. That is, it has focussed on aspects of various US plans, strategies, measures and programmes regarding the 'war on drugs'. The US anti-drug strategies, starting from as early as 1914, have been discussed. Also, the present phase of the 'war on drugs' in Latin America has been dealt with in detail in the same chapter. Not only that, the second chapter has also explored the US logic underlying the escalation of the 'war on drugs' in Latin America and the Caribbean countries.

It has been found out in the second chapter how a predominantly public health issue like illegal drugs consuming has first been criminalized by the US government and then, been militarised over the years. The issue of narco-trafficking has overshadowed all other important issues in Colombia-US relationship, influenced them, shaped them, and finally made them all subservient to itself. The second chapter has not only traced the evolution of drug issue in the US administrative rationale as well as in common public psyche; but has also focussed on the changing dimensions of narco-trafficking in the Colombia-US relations. The present linkages between the 'war on drugs' and the war on terrorism, as established by the US government, have also been explored in that chapter.

The third chapter, on the other hand, highlights the supply side dimension of narco-trafficking; that is, the Colombian counternarcotics strategies, plans and programmes. Like the second chapter, this chapter examines the changing dynamics through a chronological order focussing on the approach adopted by successive Colombian governments since the 1980s. The evolution of the Colombia-US relationship has also been explained in the light of the 'war on drugs' in this chapter. It has also been shown, how all other important bilateral issues between Colombia and the US have become subordinated to the 'war on drugs'.

In the third chapter, it has been discussed how the Colombian governments over the years have dealt with the US counternarcotics strategy on their own soil and how the international politico-economic situation has had influenced their approach towards the issue of drug trafficking. The Colombian ruling elite's different approaches to narco-trafficking on one hand and narco-terrorism on the other have also been dealt with. The operations of two most important Colombian drug cartels, namely, Medellin and Cali, have also been discussed to show the changing nature of the international drug business.

The fourth chapter, on the other hand, has discussed in detail the impact of the 'war on drugs' on Colombian state and society. It argues that the 'war on drugs' has furthered the already existing tensions in Colombian state and society. The non-state actors in Colombian society and their role have also been discussed at some length. The chapter also tries to seek the answer of the crucial question of the actual US interest behind the 'war on drugs'.

In the fourth chapter, the most crucial point of this study has been made with an extensive discussion of Colombian economy, politics, society and law and order. The point is, notwithstanding the steady increase of the US's mostly militaristic counternarcotics aid to Colombia and the escalation of the 'war on drugs', the counternarcotics strategy of both the US and Colombia is bound to fail. The Colombian problem is much more complex.

Colombia offers a classic case of an unequal society, which has for the ages been marked by societal instability, widespread violence and gross violation of human rights. The US 'war on drugs' has further complicated the problem. What is needed in Colombia in such a precarious situation is a vast reform of the existing system, if not a complete change of regime. Militarisation cannot solve the problem of inequality that is the root cause of the instability and near civil war situation in Colombia.

The present chapter gives an overview of the problem with a view to present some generalised statements as to the nature and consequences of the problem of narco-trafficking and the militarised response of the US to the problem. It also highlights the other policy objectives of US, the flaws in the 'war on drugs', its actual intents, nature and consequences for the Colombian state and society. Along with all these, it offers a logical conclusion by merging the research findings and basic points made in the previous chapters.

The 'War on Drugs'—Certain Basic Points

The US strategy in the 'war on drugs' evidently has two main objectives. On one hand, it focuses on reducing supply of illegal drugs (such as cocaine, heroin and marijuana) from the source countries in order to curb the consumption and its other effects on the American society and economy. The overall approach is to discourage the domestic consumption of drugs through the adoption of extremely tough measures including penal action and sanctions.

At the same time, on the other hand, the counternarcotics measures have been meshed with geo-political and geo-economic objectives in the larger Caribbean Basin region. However, the US counternarcotics strategy has had so far failed both to reduce, and much less, eliminate the consumption at home as well as its production and smuggling into the US from Colombia and other Caribbean Basin countries. It is not to argue that there has never been any success for the US. For example, Operation Greenback, the ouster of the Noriega regime in Panama, the killing of the notorious

Colombian drug capo Pablo Escobar, the capture and surrender of the leaders of the Cali cartel—all have had been listed as achievements by the US counternarcotics strategists. But that is hardly satisfactory considering the extent and reach of the problem and, even more, the consequences of the ‘war on drugs’ for Colombia.

In spite of the creation of a huge counternarcotics bureaucracy, deployment of the armed forces equipped with the latest technology and the increased spending (\$38 billion between 1989 and 1993 alone); the ‘war on drugs’ has failed to attain its objective. The US’s huge market has made (and is still doing so) international narcotics trade the world’s fastest growing industry, with profits of some \$400 billion annually.¹

The prices of cocaine, heroin and marijuana have remained more or less stable; over-production and over-supply have in fact sometimes led to actual reduction in prices. Since the cocaine boom of the 1980s, the US market for cocaine has stabilised. Simultaneously, the heroin consumption in the US has increased. Marijuana consumption as well as its domestic cultivation is also on the rise in the US. Moreover, more potent kinds of drugs, such as Ice, PCP, LSD, Ecstasy, methamphetamine, amphetamine, and methaqualone have become more easily available than before in the US.

One may blame the parents and changing nature of family as an institution in the US, or media for sensationalising the problem; and therefore argue in favour of further escalation of the ‘war on drugs’. Indeed, within US, few support the idea of a reevaluation of the entire counternarcotics strategy. Then there are those who are actually favouring the legalisation of drugs. Though the available data clearly point out that the two legal drugs, tobacco and alcohol, have been killing more people than their illegal counterparts, the drug problem is being seen more and more as a threat to the US state security and social integrity.

¹ Ron Chepesiuk, *Hard Target: The United States War Against International Drug Trafficking, 1982-1997*, (North Carolina, 1999), p.258.

As for Colombia, the country is admittedly at the receiving end in the 'war on drugs' both in terms of economic dislocation, violence and instability, and its social repercussion. For one, the limited electoral democracy that Colombian elites have practised since the late 1950s has long ago become truncated, as it has failed to provide political space to the emerging new social forces in the wake of economic and other changes. The limited efforts that have been to make it a more inclusionary system have been stymied by the 'war on drugs'. The Colombian armed forces, keeping pace with the Latin American tradition, have been a part of the dominating and ruling elite in the country, enjoying professional, institutional and even personal ties with the ruling elites. They have been really instrumental in the perpetuation of the exclusionary political and economic system in force in Colombia. 'War on drugs' has enhanced not only the political role of armed forces; but also entrusted it with the extreme arbitrary powers and immunising it from various judicial reviews.

Colombia, as has been discussed in the previous chapters, has an exclusionary bi-partisan political system, which leaves very little or almost no place for the dissenters. Thanks to the social hierarchy, it is next to impossible for any interest group outside the political and economic elite, to stake claims for a share in the power and position in the existing Colombian regime in a constitutional way. It is this kind of exclusionary and rigid pattern of politics that accounts for the rise of various leftist and other guerrilla movements, both in urban and rural areas.

Given the power and resources at the command of the narco-traffickers, it is they who have been able to penetrate the elite circles and merge with it, influencing and controlling various levers of state power. This comes out more clearly in the occasional combined efforts and campaigns of the armed forces and the drug barons against the leftist insurgents.

Moreover, as has been detailed in the fourth chapter, the US drug war and the basic flaws inherent into it have proved fatal for the already unstable government in Colombia. The militarisation of the drug war on the other hand has further deepened the

problem. The basic flaws of the ‘war on drugs’ strategy should, therefore, be discussed in order to understand the inbuilt weaknesses of the whole strategy.

The Inbuilt Flaws of The ‘War on Drugs’

While the repeated failures of the drug wars have led to the resultant escalation, the policy-makers both in Colombia and the US have failed—or refused—to recognise that unless and until the inbuilt flaws in the drug war strategy are taken care of, success in ‘war on drugs’ would at best be a distant dream. This inability or unwillingness explains why the US has always answered failure in drug wars with escalation, both in monetary and military terms. Besides, it has had only a limited interest in encouraging and funding the crop substitution, in place of crop eradication, strategy in the coca cultivating regions of Peru and Bolivia.

There exists a consensus among most of the ‘war on drugs’ experts that there are some inherent weaknesses or faults within the whole strategy itself. All of them agree to the proposition that these flaws are basically different from the failures of the drug wars. However, they do not enjoy the same consensus when it comes to pointing out what these flaws actually are.

There have been broadly two most important trends in the explanation of these basic flaws among the experts. On one hand, experts like Eva Bertram have explained the inherent flaws in the drug war strategy in a matter-of-fact way, pointing out the practical weaknesses in the ‘war on drugs’.² On the other hand, experts like Bruce M. Bagley and Juan G. Tokatlian have emphasised on the inbuilt flaws of the realist paradigm in the ‘war on drugs’.³

² Eva Bertram et al., *Drug War Politics: The Price of Denial*, (Berkeley, 1996). Bertram and her co-authors have dealt with the actual problems the US counternarcotics strategy is confronting without resorting to any theoretical explanation.

³ Jonathan Hartlyn, et al., *The United States and Latin America in The 1990s: Beyond The Cold War*, (Chapel Hill, 1992). These experts have discussed the inherent flaws of the ‘war on drugs’ strategy within a theoretical framework.

The first group of experts have pointed out some basic flaws of the US counternarcotics strategy and its Colombian counterpart. Among them, the two most important flaws are, to borrow Bertram's terminology, the 'profit paradox' and the 'hydra effect'. The 'profit paradox' emphasises that the laws of supply and demand drive the international drug trafficking like any other businesses. The policy-makers have stressed the criminal dimension of the illegal drugs trade so much, that they have forgotten the simple fact that it is actually a market problem, rather a black market problem.

Like other classic cases of black market, the drug business is also the inevitable result of government attempts to make highly sought after commodities illegal. And the same government's 'war on drugs' strategy tries to suppress it. However, the counternarcotics effort so far have failed to achieve its primary goal: to raise the street prices of illegal drugs so much that the consumers will be unable to afford the same. But could this really offer some kind of a viable long-term solution? The answer invariably is in the negative.

On the contrary, whatever success it has gained to raise the prices, has actually inflated the profit. And these high profits have had the 'paradoxical effect'. They have provided (and is still doing the same) a steady incentive for drug suppliers to remain in the trade and for new suppliers to enter the market. This is a very simple economic principle that the counternarcotics strategists have failed to recognise in their attempts to criminalise the issue. Steven Wisotsky puts it aptly: "If the cocaine industry commissioned a consultant to design a mechanism to ensure its profitability, it could not have done better than the 'war on drugs': just enough pressure to inflate prices, but not enough to keep its product from the market."⁴

The 'hydra effect', points out the self-reproduction capacity of the illegal drug trade. In reality, most popular drugs like cocaine, marijuana and heroin are easy to cultivate, process, smuggle and sell. The investment and skill needed to enter this

⁴ Quoted in Bertram, n.2, p.13.

business is not very high, while profits are enormous.⁵ Therefore, attempts to cut off the trade in one place simply lead to new recruits or old suppliers to start operating from some other place to meet the demand.

On the other hand, the second group of experts have adopted a theoretical framework while explaining the failure of the 'war on drugs'. For them the flaws in the 'war on drugs' strategies are the flaws inherent in the realist paradigm in which it is set. To put it in a nutshell, the realist train of thought in international relations mainly consists of four propositions: (a) nation-states are the main actors in international politics; (b) state policy-makers as rational actors design and implement foreign policy; (c) national security interests are the priority issues in any nation's foreign policy agenda; and (d) given the anarchic and conflicting nature of the international politics, every nation has to act unilaterally in order to guard its national interests and security and employ every available resource to achieve that end.

If this realist perspective is applied to the 'war on drugs', the US has the right as well as the duty to use its power and position as the world's only superpower to persuade or compel the subordinate states (which, in effect, most of the Latin American states including Colombia are) to comply with its plan and programmes in the 'war on drugs', which has become a national security concern for the US since the 1980s. This inevitably leads to the adoption of a supply side strategy and unilateral militarised escalation of the war. And here lies the basic flaws of the 'war on drugs' strategy, which are actually the basic flaws of the realist interpretation.

In the arena of international drug trafficking, notwithstanding the first realist assumption, multiple sub-national and trans-national actors are operating. Most of these actors operate outside the national authorities' sphere of control, often in direct defiance of the same. The weak governments of Latin America, especially of Colombia, who do not even control their entire territory in most cases, are no match to these sophisticated,

⁵ Most of these countries are third world countries, for which drug cultivating, processing and trafficking not only mean employment to a huge part of the population, but also major revenues and foreign exchanges for the respective national economies.

heavily armed and ruthless new-age 'MNCs', called drug cartels. Even the relatively powerful US government has failed to do so.

Secondly, for the Latin American governing elites, there are much more crucial jobs at hand than fighting the drug kingpins. And they do not enjoy the opportunity to select and execute foreign policies. With weak political and economic bases, it is more than difficult for them to attain a consensus on basic national interests. And given the exclusionary character of the Colombian economy and politics, the ruling elite's proclaimed national interest often do not have any meaning for rest of the country.

The drug issue has also failed to remain a concrete priority even for the US foreign policy-makers. The US has a number of interests in Latin America such as regime stabilisation, foreign debt repayment, economic growth based on a neo-liberal model, anti-communism, and, above all, its geo-political and geo-economic hegemony to promote and pursue.⁶ Given that situation, the US has often had to compromise in 'war on drugs' due to other issues and vice versa.

Finally, the use of unilateral force, such as certification granting MFN status, trade and military sanctions, retaliation and direct interventions, and imposition of military aid packages have also not been proved effective in the case of 'war on drugs'. The Latin American states' hard effort to comply with the US drug war strategy undermines their sovereignty and weakens their legitimacy, at a time when they needed to be strengthened to fight the drug cartels.

Both these explanations, though in many ways provide insightful analyses, have, however, failed in one respect. They did not probe into the heart of the matter: why is the US still carrying on with the 'war on drugs' when it is continuously failing to achieve any impressive or even satisfactory results? It is simplistic enough to think that US policy-makers are ignorant of the basic flaws inherent in the strategy, obviously not so after all

⁶ Hartlyn, n.3, p.220. The last factor is viable even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, not only because of the Marxist guerrillas who are actively operating in many LAC countries, but also because of the current trend of leftist governments being elected in many Latin American countries.

these years of attempts. And the resources directed towards it have increased every year along side the increasing militarisation.

Therefore, the basic question remains, why is the US insisting on the continuation of the 'war on drugs'? Obviously there are other reasons behind the anti-drug rhetoric of the US administrations. And these reasons, very much like the 'war on drugs' itself, have evolved over the period.

The Potential US Objectives Behind The 'War on Drugs'

A critical examination of the situation reveals more than that meets the eye. The potential objectives of the US behind the 'war on drugs' can be categorised broadly into three sections: geo-strategic, political, and economic.

(i) Geo-strategically, Colombia was a very important ally in the Cold War era. It offered the US a strong strategic base in Latin America and the Caribbean in the crusade against 'communist threat and subversion'. Significantly the 'war on Communism' is not yet over, notwithstanding the end of Cold War and the decline of various leftist movements in Latin America. Colombia remains an example; where counternarcotics military aid has so often been used and directed against the strongholds of the leftist insurgents.

Besides, the 'war on communism' has been very conveniently meshed with the US global 'war on terrorism', with some of the Colombian leftist insurgents groups being categorised as 'terrorist organisations'. The upshot of all these is that the strategic advantage of Colombia has only increased. Given the geographical location of the country, Colombia provides a strategic depth to US in the heartland of South America as well as a capacity to monitor and shape events in the entire Caribbean Basin.

Understandably, none of the US naval or aerial bases, set up in Colombia in the Cold War era have been dismantled; to the contrary, many more bases and radar sites have been added in the 1990s not only in Colombia but in several other countries in

Central America, Andean region and the Caribbean. Not only that, in the name of ‘war on drugs’, more troops equipped with new advanced technological appliances are being deployed to those bases and sites.

In addition, hundreds of US agents are operating all over Colombia and neighbouring countries in order to find out and arrest the drug smugglers. Though the stated objective of these agents is to carry on the US counternarcotics strategies in the Andean region, their extensive network has US security objectives, too. Besides, the drug interdiction drives carried out by the US Coast Guard means frequent operation in the national territorial waters of the Caribbean Basin countries.

(ii) Politically also, the US has a vested interest in keeping and maintaining the present political regime in Colombia. The nature of the Colombian political system has already been discussed in details in the fourth chapter of this paper. The bipartisan and exclusionary character of the Colombian political system has been well discussed and analysed.

The governing conservative elite of Colombia has proved a faithful ally of the US. It has given the US a ‘free rein’ in its drug war policies in Colombia as well as in many other cases, thereby in effect risking Colombia’s sovereignty and societal stability. The US in return is supporting their cause, thereby providing them legitimacy from outside which they have failed to get within the country.

The US, on the other hand, is supporting the Colombian elite rule in its own interest. Nowadays in Latin America a new leftist-socialist trend is on the rise. In countries like Chile, Brazil and Venezuela, leftist and socialist governments have come into power. Fidel Castro, the Cuban leader and traditional communist enemy of the US is still live and kicking. The Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez has also openly criticised the US administration in harsh terms. The rising neo-conservatives in the US are vehemently opposed to this new wake of leftist-socialist governments in LAC countries.

It is not yet time to say that these new leftist-socialist governments have the potential to threaten US hegemony in the hemisphere. Nevertheless, it is not very convenient for the US to have a large group of dissenters close home. To keep an eye on them, it needs to maintain a strong physical presence in Latin America and the 'war on drugs' has provided it an opportunity to do the same in a covert way.

The US 'war on drugs' in Colombia has become more complex in recent years. The drug wars have long been mixed up with anti-guerrilla actions. In the post-9/11 scenario, the 'war on drugs' has converged with the 'war on terrorism' in Colombia. The US seems to emphasize a militaristic solution of the guerrilla issue. This has undermined the negotiation process with the Colombian guerrillas. The condemnation of FARC as one of the terrorist groups figuring in the US list marks this newer dimension of 'war on drugs'.

And the Colombian ruling elite, for their own vested interest, has opened the doors of Colombia for the US military, which, in the name of hunting and tracking down the drug traffickers, is actually bent on eliminating not only the armed guerrillas but also the civic union workers. The Colombian armed forces and the private paramilitary groups have also joined them in this 'dirty war'.

Both the US and the Colombian governing elite are, therefore, opposing a true democratisation in Colombia. A true democratisation in Colombia would mean some land reform, changes in economic policies and objectives, the process of bringing back all the political dissenters into the mainstream politics, increase in the civilian power vis-à-vis the military, a cut-off in bureaucratic hegemony and 'red tapism', and an end to the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the select few.

In that case, Colombia would have been in a much better position to take care of its human rights problem, violence and criminalisation of society, weakening sovereignty, narco terrorism etc. But US interests seem to lie elsewhere. It is not very difficult to recognise which side of the Colombian 'dirty war' the US is on.

(iii) There is also an economic aspect of this complex problem. In the fourth chapter the highly unequal character of the Colombian economy has been discussed. The establishment of a neo-liberal economic model in Colombia has further aggravated the problem. But the Colombian neo-liberal economic elite enjoys full US support as the neo-liberal economic model being followed has actually been proposed by the US and implemented through international monetary institutions such as IMF and World Bank.

Foreign investors, mainly US multinationals in petroleum and other sectors have also pitched in providing financial and military assistance to the Colombian government in its war against the drugs. It is not beside the point that the Colombian government in its campaigns against the leftist insurgents has often used such financial assistance. Thus there is also an economic factor that is driving the US 'war on drugs' in Colombia.

It must be remembered that the US neo-liberal market reform strategies in Colombia have unintentionally helped the narco-traffickers who behave more like MNCs these days. On the other hand, the US efforts to strengthen the punitive institutions of Colombian state against the narco-traffickers are disturbing the speed of the neo-liberal market reforms. That is how, at times, US policy is working at cross-purposes in Colombia.

(iv) The US oil interest in Colombia is another potential objective. Rise of this new geo-economic interest of the US in Colombia has added a new dimension in the Colombia-US relationship coloured by the 'war on drugs'. In the South American continent, Venezuela has been the most important oil supplier to the US. Of late, the Venezuela-US diplomatic relations have been at a low. Though US is still the biggest market for the Venezuelan oil, the rise of oil industry in Colombia has attracted deeper US interest in that country.

Though Colombia exports huge quantity of oil to the US annually, the guerrillas and the paramilitaries have often tried to established control over the Colombian oilfields and in some cases they have succeeded, too. There is also the question of safety of oil

pipelines, which run for several hundred miles to the coast of Colombia. In such a situation, Colombian government has hit back the guerrillas and the paramilitaries with brutal force. The US military has proved to be really useful in providing support to the Colombian punitive forces. Oil has replaced coffee as the main Colombian export; and the economic interests of the elite in both Colombia and the US have supported such a policy.

The 'Heroic Operation' of the present Alvaro Uribe (2002-present) government in Arauca, home to the Cano Limon oilfield that accounts for 30 per cent of Colombia's oil production, can be taken as the most recent example. The area has been a bone of contention between the right wing paramilitaries and the army and the left wing guerrillas. The innocent civilian population has had to bear the brunt of the conflict. A special security zone has been set up in this region that has displaced local elected officials and suspended civil liberties.

Ironically, the security situation in Arauca has deteriorated further after the special security zone was set up. Teachers, health workers and trade union activists are the main targets of the army. They are being harassed, imprisoned, and even killed in appalling numbers. However, the matters are quite different with the oil company and the US government. Occidental Petroleum that operates in Arauca has funded the army's controversial 18th Brigade, the main army force in the department. The US government also funds the 18th Brigade, without showing any concern to the fact that it has been accused of abuses against civilians and of cooperation with the paramilitaries. Thus oil interest seems to be a very important US objective that needs further examination.

While these four above-mentioned issues are the main US objectives underlying the 'war on drugs', Colombian interests also often compliment US goals and objectives. It is true that being a dependent economy, Colombia has to comply with the US counternarcotics and related policies, sometimes reluctantly. So far, whenever Colombian governments have sought negotiate with the leftist guerrillas and bring them into the political parliamentary mainstream, negotiations have often fallen through. Besides, all

attempts to show independence vis-à-vis US policies have earned the ire of US; with the latter denying either certification conferring MFN status or politically pressuring the regimes.

Politically, Colombian ruling elite faces the problem of establishing the legitimacy of their regime vis-à-vis the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, the narco-traffickers and several other armed 'self-help' groups. The Colombian government does not possess enough strength both politically and militarily to control the entire Colombian territory and its subjects. Large territories remain under the control of leftist guerrilla groups; private paramilitaries, who are in the service of landowning classes, perpetrate violence and repression with impunity; and armed forces work with immunity and impunity in the special zones. The main casualty in the process is sovereignty of the state that has shrunk as vast areas remain beyond its control and laws.

Economically also, for their own vested interest, the Colombian neo-liberal elite has been in favour of the US counternarcotics policies. In the fourth chapter of this paper, these issues have been discussed at great length. The position Colombian ruling elite in the 'war on drugs' has been the most precarious. On one hand, they are complying with the US counternarcotics strategies and programmes on Colombian soil both in their own vested interest and out of US fear. On the other hand, this very policy to keep their interests intact is undermining their legitimacy, power and position within Colombia and outside.

The inability or the unwillingness of most of the policy-makers in both Colombia and the US to recognise the inbuilt flaws of the 'war on drugs' has led them to respond with the same logic used to confront the failure of militarisation: escalation. And very obviously, like the previous cases of escalation, the current escalation of the 'war on drugs' is bound to meet failure once again.

The present study has discussed and analysed thoroughly the issue of 'war on drugs' and its impact on the Colombia-US relationship. Divided in five chapters, it has

also explained the impact of the 'war on drugs' on Colombian state and society. It has thrown light on the inbuilt flaws of the drug war as well and has seek to answer the most crucial question of the underlying US (as well as Colombian) objectives in the 'war on drugs'.

In the final conclusion, it can be said that the issue of 'war on drugs' by nature is a very complex problem. Added to that, the present monograph has discussed a more problematic and complicated issue of the impact of 'war on drugs' on Colombian state and society. Colombia presents a very classic case of state conflict and near civil war situation. Within the boundary of the present study, that complex situation has also been analysed. The present study has also tried to trace the evolution of the 'war on drugs' till date and has discussed at length the changing faces of the drug war in the current international situation.

It seems that Enrique Salgado Coredro, one time chief of the Mexican Police, was right in his comment about the 'war on drugs' when he said that, "It's a battle with no end."⁷ The current changes in the international system have resulted in the changing dimensions of the international drug trafficking. And the approach towards this issue is also undergoing a transformation. While the scholars and experts all over the world are increasingly supporting the cause of the legalisation of all narcotics and psychoactive substances, the US policy-makers are in favour of more militarisation of the 'war on drugs', which has now been linked with the US global 'war on terrorism'.

The issue of 'war on drugs' still forms the core of the Colombian-US relationship. And the nature of this issue is bound to evolve further with the changing dimensions of the international situation. "People say the '80s are over, but they must be talking about lifestyles, not narcotics trafficking," said Lee Stapleton, one time chief of narcotics for the US Attorney's Office in Miami, Florida.⁸ The same can be said even today while finally concluding the present study.

⁷ Quoted in Chepesiuk, n.1, p.257.

⁸ Quoted in *ibid*, p.96.

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